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THE FIGHT OF THE "FIRECREST"

THE RECORD OF A LONE-HAND CRUISE
FROM EAST TO WEST, ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

BY

ALAIN GERBAULT

WITH PHOTOGRAPHS, PLANS AND A MAP



NEW YORK

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

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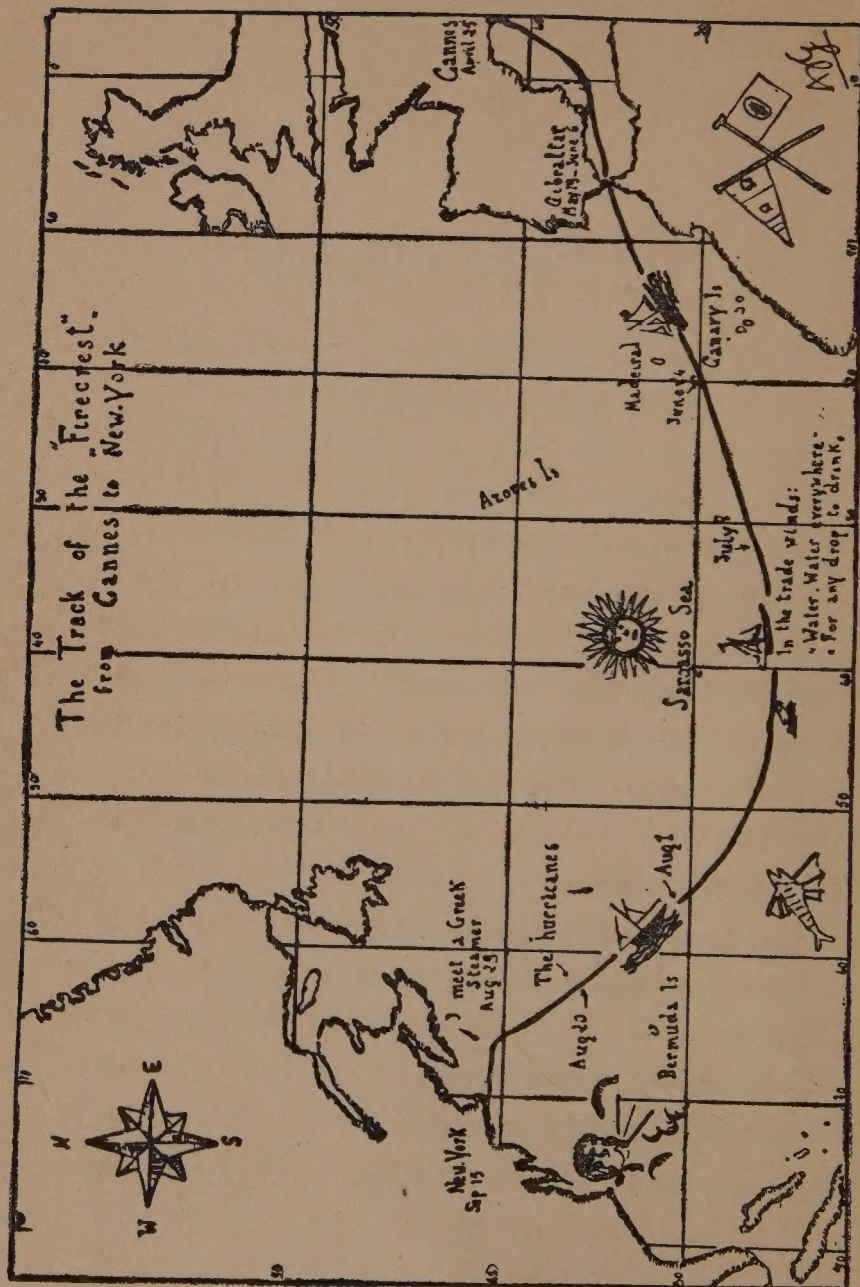
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THE TRACK OF THE "FIRECREST" FROM CANNES TO NEW YORK

THE FIGHT OF THE "FIRECREST"

CHAPTER I

WHICH IS REALLY THE PREFACE

IT is in a country house near New York, and on a wonderfully quiet evening, that I am wondering whether the adventures of the past months are real. Glancing out through the window I can see Long Island Sound, and the mast of my little *Firecrest* a few hundred yards away as she lies alongside Fort Totten pier.

But it is not a dream. I have crossed the Atlantic alone, and am now in the United States. Less than a month ago I was tossing like a cork on the crest of the waves, and fighting for life against hurricanes that buried my little boat under tons of green water and tore her sails to ribbons.

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

Near me is the log book that I never failed to keep, even in the worst weather. Turning the leaves, still moistened with salt water, my eyes fall on this interesting day of my cruise:

“Aboard the *Firecrest*, the 14th of August, at sea, 34 degrees 45 minutes of north latitude and 56 degrees 10 minutes of west longitude.

“Strong westerly gales. The motion of the boat has been fierce all night, and seas are breaking aboard every minute. At four o'clock in the morning a jib sheet broke under the strain, and I had to splice it at once. The deck is all the time under water. Keeping all the hatches shut down does not prevent getting everything soaked down below. Cooking my breakfast is a very difficult task, and it is only after two hours of tossing about in the narrow galley, and after having my head bumped many times against the panels of the forecastle, that I am able to absorb a cup of tea and some bacon rashers.

“At nine a.m. the reef lacing of my staysail

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breaks. The motion of the boat is now so violent, and the wind so strong, that I cannot repair it. All my cups and glasses are broken into small pieces.

“At noon a huge wave breaks aboard and carries away my sail locker hatch. The waves are increasing in size, the sea is now tremendous. It blows so hard that my sails cannot stand the strain. A big hole appears in my staysail, and my mainsail rips down the centre seam, leaving a three-yard-long slit. I have to lower both to save them: a very difficult and risky job to do in such a wind, and with such a sea.

“Can hardly stand on the wet and slippery deck, and it requires one full hour to accomplish the task. I am tempted to set my storm trysail, but the wind is still increasing. It is now a real hurricane. In such weather no sail can stand. The humming of the steel shrouds now gives exactly the same note one hears in a fast express train. It means that the wind attains a velocity of more than sixty miles an hour.

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x "It is necessary now or never to use my sea anchor. Have made one end of a forty-fathom line fast to the sea-anchor and the other end fast to my anchor chain. Have dropped the steel-hooped bag overboard, attaching to it a small buoy as a float. The line has stiffened, and, very slowly, the boat's head has come into the wind.

x "The motion is not now so bad, although I am badly pounded by the seas. I have lashed some old sails on the top of my sail locker to prevent the water from rushing in. I am feeling absolutely dead tired, but have still more work to do. Have taken down below my tattered sails, and, closing behind me all the openings, have spent all the evening and the greater part of the night with palm and needle.

"It is now raining hard. In the saloon the water is at the floor level. Trying to pump the water out I have made the annoying discovery that my pump is out of order. It is now raining harder; am soaked to the skin; there is not a single dry place in the boat, and

Which is Really the Preface

I cannot find a way to prevent the rain water leaking through many places around the skylight and hatchways."

This was but an ordinary day during the month of gales encountered toward the middle of the cruise. But what a life it was! Although it is only a few days since I landed I am longing to heave up anchor again, and live again on the open seas.

And here, too, I start dreaming. "How did I become a sailor? How did the love of the open sea come to me?"

I spent the greater part of my youth at Dinard, near the old fortified town of St. Malo, the home of the famous French corsairs who were the glory of the French navy three hundred years ago.

When my father, who spent a good part of the summer on his yacht, was not taking me with him on long cruises, I was always trying to ship with the hardy Breton fishermen for a day, and making fishermen's sons my companions. Even then my absorbing

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

ambition was to own a little craft of my own.

Once my brother and I saved money enough to buy a boat, but another bought her before we were ready. I envied the Breton fishermen their independent life, and was thrilled by the tales of their daring and hardihood.

It was at Dinard and St. Malo that I learned to love the sea, the waves and the boisterous winds. Books of adventure were my favourites. Many of them were describing the adventures of gold-hunters in Klondike and Alaska. The name Eldorado exercised great fascination for me. I used to think when I became a man I should try to discover Eldorado.

When quite a little boy Joseph Conrad put his finger one day on an unexplored part of a chart of Central Africa, and said, "When I grow up I will go there." He fulfilled his dream. I shall never fulfill my boyhood's dream, but shall probably share the fate of Edgar Allan Poe's hero.

After a happy youth by the seaside at Dinard, I was sent to Paris to study and

Which is Really the Preface

become a boarder in the Stanislas College. There, shut between high walls, longing to escape, to see the world, dreaming of adventure, I spent the most unhappy years of my life. But I had to study to graduate as a civil engineer.

When the war came I enlisted in 1914 in the Flying Corps, and after the dull life at college it was a glorious adventure.

A young American, an aviator in my squadron, the 31st French, lent me some of Jack London's books. It was in reading *The Cruise of the "Shark"* that I first learned that it was possible to cross the ocean in a small boat.

I decided at once that it was going to be my life, if I was lucky enough to get through the war. Later I was able to include two of my friends in my schemes, and to decide to buy a boat, and sail round the world after adventure. But these two friends were killed fighting in the air, and I was left alone at the armistice.

After the war I could neither work in a

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

city nor lead the dull life of a business man. I wanted freedom, open air, adventure. I found it on the sea.

Putting aside my future as a civil engineer, I searched for a year in all the French ports for a boat I could handle alone, and it was only in 1921, while visiting my friend Ralph Stock, the author of *The Cruise of the "Dream Ship,"* aboard his yacht, that I found, lying near his boat at Southampton, a nice little craft. It was the *Firecrest*.



THE "FIRECREST" AT NICE



IN MONTE CARLO HARBOUR

CHAPTER II

THE "FIRECREST"

THE *FIRECREST* is a racing cruiser, designed by the late Dixon Kemp and built by P. T. Harris at Rowhedge, Essex, in 1892. It speaks well for the designer that a boat built under the length and sail area rule has crossed the Atlantic and shown herself a splendid cruising boat.

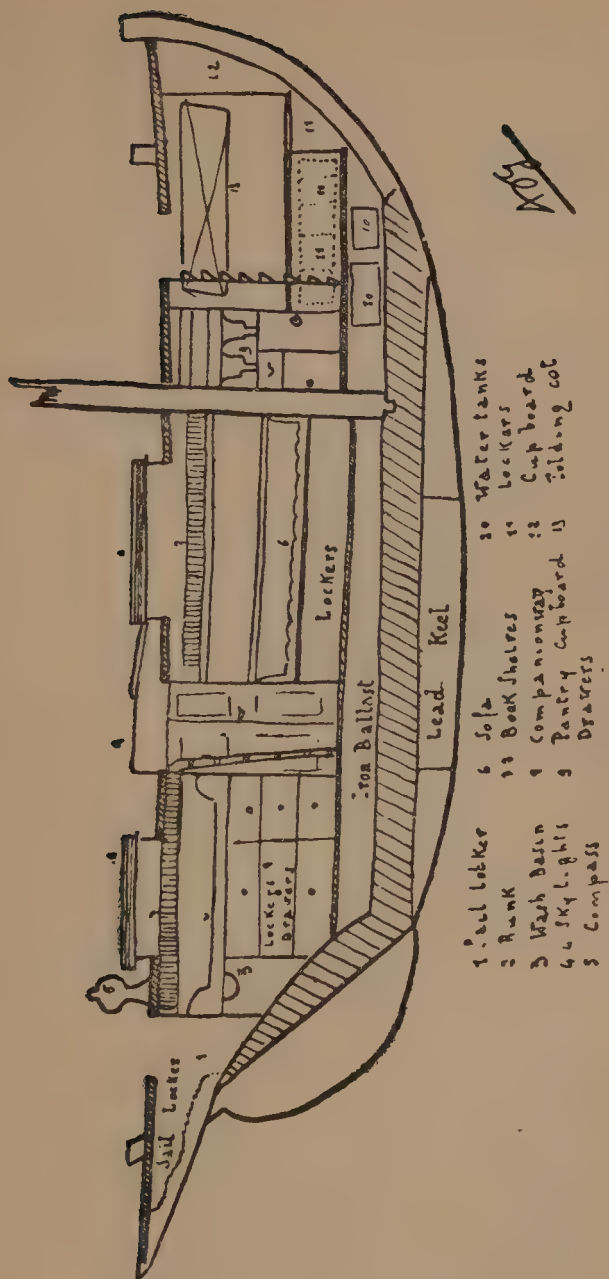
She is a typical English cutter, narrow and deep for a length of 39 feet over all and 30 feet on the water line. Her greatest beam is 8 feet 6 inches. A 7 feet draught is exceptionally deep for her size. This draught, and the three tons and a half of lead she carries on her keel, added to the three tons of inside ballast, makes it practically impossible for her to capsize. Her deck is flush, unbroken save for one companionway, and a hatch forward, two skylights and the sail locker

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

hatch, and she has the strength to resist the pressure of tons of green water breaking over her bow. She is cutter rigged, and here I can hear the great army of theoretical yachtsmen exclaim, "A cutter or sloop is not fit for cruising in alone. Why not a ketch or a schooner?" It is a matter of taste. Personally I prefer to reef sails rather than to take them in. In any case I have found that the cutter is the best cruising rig for a small boat because it gives the maximum speed with the minimum sail area.

There is not enough room on deck to carry a real lifeboat. But as a concession to the conventions, and to permit of going ashore when lying in harbour, I carry a six-foot dinghy made of canvas. It is a Berthon of the type used in France aboard submarines. It is collapsible, and once folded it takes no room at all alongside the skylights.

The *Firecrest* is very strongly built of old English oak, and teak. Although thirty-two years old she is absolutely sound, and a poem would be needed to sing her staunch-



- | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1 Pul Locker | 6 Sofa | 30 Water tanks |
| 2 Rank | 13 Book shelves | 14 Lockers |
| 3 Wash Basin | 4 Companionway | 12 Cup board |
| 4 34 L. ghts | 3 Pantry | 13 Folding cot |
| 5 Compass | Drawers | |

THE "FIRECREST'S" ACCOMMODATION PLAN

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

ness. But better that I refrain, and, instead, describe the inside of my floating home.

This home comprises three compartments, separated by doors and bulkheads. Astern lies my sleeping cabin with two bunks, and lockers under them. A wash-basin receives the water of a fifteen-gallon tank fixed under the deck. The cabin is panelled with mahogany and bird's-eye maple. On each side racks are filled with books. Forward of the sleeping room, and amidships, is a saloon likewise panelled with mahogany and maple. On each side are two cupboards with good accommodation. In the centre is a folding table. In the bow is the "fo'c'sle," with two folding cots and a galley. Here I cook my meals on a Swedish kerosene stove, which is hung on gimbals to keep it vertical when the boat is rolling. On either side are numerous lockers filled with provisions; ship's biscuits, rice and potatoes. On the port-side is a pump communicating with two tanks of fresh water. For light I have a kerosene lamp and candles hung on gimbals.



THE LINES OF THE "FIRECREST," A TYPICAL DIXON KEMP CUTTER, BUILT IN 1892. OVERALL LENGTH 39 FEET; BEAM 8 FEET 6 INCHES

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

This boat is my only home, and she carries aboard all my possessions. What do I care, therefore, if there is no wind? I am in no hurry. I am at home with my best friends—my books. There is not much room aboard, but I can carry fourteen feet of literature, which measurement means about two hundred books, and they are all books of adventure or poems. Loti, Farrère, Conrad, Stevenson, Jack London, James Connolly, Shakespeare and Kipling are in the place of honour with Poe, Verbacren, Platon, Shelley, François Villon, Lord Tennyson and John Masefield.

I like them so much that it is difficult to rank them in order of preference, but of all the books which range themselves along my little cabin shelves those which have to do with the sea take first place.

I have always thought Edgar Allan Poe to be the greatest poet, for to the perfection of rhythm he adds nobleness of thought.

But I am also very fond of Jack London, a master of the short story, whose life

The *Firecrest*

exercised a great fascination for me. He always wrote with power and yet simplicity. Although he shipped very young aboard a three-masted schooner one senses that he was never a sailor at heart, though he stayed always a lover of open air and adventure.

I remember that one day, after a storm, I threw overboard some books by Oscar Wilde whose lack of sincerity jarred upon a temperament rendered simple by contact with the sea. Out of the lot I kept only "The Ballad of Reading Gaol."

Stevenson evidently had in common with London a great love for open air and adventure. He, too, seems never to have been a sailor at heart, unless one excepts his fine poem, "Christmas at Sea," for he never described that which is beautiful about the life and hardships of sailors.

Victor Hugo has often wonderful descriptions of storms. That of the tempest in "The Man Who Laughs" is to my mind magnificent. It is a pity, however, that the

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

technical terms are all wrong. The cyclone revolves in the opposite direction to that exacted by Nature. But then some paintings are often wonderful although they disregard all the laws of perspective.

Shakespeare describes the sailor as a ruffian without describing anything that is beautiful in him. His descriptions are fine, and the technical errors very few, although he makes ships start from Bohemian ports; an error similar to the one in Kipling's famous poem, "The Road to Mandalay." Kipling is probably one of the greatest sea-writers, and certainly a very great poet. Amongst my favourites by him is "The Last Chantey."

✱ James Connolly described wonderfully the life and hardships of American fishermen.

Pierre Loti ranks high in my esteem. *Pêcheur d'Islande* and *Mon Frère Yves* are in the place of honour, although he often got his inspiration from the navigating bridge and not from the forecastle.

Herman Melville is also in my library, and

The *Firecrest*

I am never tired of reading *Moby Dick* and *Typee*.

Conrad, that great writer of the sea, and describer, with true art of tempests and typhoons, is not my favourite author. I suppose it is because the psychology of his heroes is far too complicated for me.

Although he is not such a great writer, Bill Adams holds in my esteem, as a lover of the sea, a higher place than Conrad. Some of his short stories seem to be well nigh perfect, and evidently he was one of the few writers to see that which is beautiful in the rough life of sailors. He loves the sea and, for that reason, is nearer me than any other writer.

And last of all, in a shelf near my bunk, are my very favourite books. They are all either poems or ballads. For somehow I feel that the ballad is the aptest poetical form with which to describe the roving life of sailormen.

For this reason John Masefield is next to my bunk, for he is the poet I like best with his salt water ballads, and of all these "Sea-Fever" and the haunting "Cape Horn

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Gospel.” How wonderfully he describes life aboard sailing ships and understands the beauty of a sailor’s life; but we must not forget that many centuries before him Antiphilos of Byzance had written, “Oh! Give me my berth in the worst corner of the boat. The joy to hear the leather panels sound under the pounding of the flying spray.

“Give! Take! Games and yarns of sailormen—I had all this happiness—I who am of plain tastes.”

CHAPTER III

WESTWARD TO GIBRALTAR

HAVING bought my boat I took it at once to the south of France, leaving England at the time that Shackleton started on his last trip. My boat withstood very well the gales of the Bay of Biscay, and having survived them I could not imagine worse weather to stop the *Firecrest*.

During more than a year I cruised about the south coast of France with a young English boy, and incidentally played in lawn tennis tournaments on the French Riviera. Lawn tennis had been for a long time my favourite sport, but after living aboard, and cruising about for more than two years, all the things which happened on land became of minor importance to one who had started.

It was only for the fun of the thing and to

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

prove to myself that I could do it all alone that I started on my trip to America. During more than a year I trained physically, cruising in all sorts of weather, learning to handle my sails alone. Only when I felt myself ready, when I knew that I could stand the mental and physical strain, did I start on my cruise.

At last came the glorious day of departure. The gay harbour of Cannes lay basking in the spring sunshine. On one side the old town and two great, square towers dominate the harbour. On the other side were about fifty white yachts tied up to the quays. Next to my boat is *Perlette*, a small 15-foot boat owned by two young girls who are its only crew. Their boldness is very much admired by all the fishermen and the land lubbers along the quay, who stop to watch them flying about barefoot up the rigging.

A little farther on the *Lavengro*, a 120-ton ketch, is preparing to sail for the same destination as mine, Gibraltar. Although I have a small chance to defeat a boat ten

Westward to Gibraltar

times bigger than mine and manned by a crew of seven, I did not want to be beaten at the start. I managed to weigh anchor first, and got under way under all canvas. The light breeze is freshening and I must take in my topsail, even as I passed between the moles. There I waved a last good-bye to the two little French girl sailors and to the French-Breton crew of the yacht *Eblis*, who are waving their handkerchiefs to me from the pier.

Outside the harbour the wind is freshening again and I have to change my jib, reef my mainsail and do it quickly, for I can see now *Lavengro* leaving the harbour and racing after me. We are both tacking against a strong head wind, and although not sailing as fast as the *Lavengro* I can keep the better wind. We are rushing towards the open sea and leaving the beautiful golden island of Lerins on the lee. Outside the sheltered bay waves and wind increase. My lee rail is deeply buried in the water. Spray is splashing above. It is an oilskin job to steer.

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

But my heart is light, and as the *Firecrest's* bow cuts the waves I am singing a complaint of Breton fishermen.

*La bonne sainte lui a repondu: Il vente
C'est le vent de la mer qui nous tourmente.*

*The good lady answered: It blows
It is the wind of the sea that torments us.*

The glass is falling and black clouds appear ahead. Land is becoming scarcely visible. At four-thirty o'clock I am crossing *Lavengro's* bow, close-hauled on the other tack when a strong squall strikes us. In haste I lower my mainsail and take in my jib. As the task was finished I caught a last glimpse of the *Lavengro* running before the gale in the opposite direction.

I am now so tired from the exertions of the day that I stay hove to for the night under storm jib and close reefed mainsail, and leaving my boat to take care of herself, I go below and turn in.

Westward to Gibraltar

Here are some extracts from my log:

“26th April.

“At two in the morning the wind shifts to north-west and I am able to run before the wind under *squaresail*. My boat is making at this time the best speed she will ever make during this cruise. My log records thirty miles in three hours. The glass is falling. A strong gale is still blowing. At six in the evening the wind increases again. It is very difficult to keep the boat on her course. Soon it becomes quite dangerous to run before the wind. I am going almost as fast as the following sea; so when a wave breaks aboard, the green seas stay on the deck a dangerously long time.

“The operation of taking in my *squaresail* is very dangerous. The *squaresail* yard, twenty feet long, is twice as long as my boat's beam. As I take it in my boat now runs under bare poles and rolls violently in the trough of the sea. The lee-end of the yard drags in a wave and I nearly go overboard.

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

Only after fully an hour's dangerous work do I have the yard-arm and sail safely and snugly stowed alongside the deck. I decided to use it no more, and very tired after sixteen hours at the tiller, I hove the boat to for the night.

"27th April.

"All night very hard rain and gale. Seas breaking aboard all night. The glass is still falling and I stay hove to all day. In the morning I discover that my rolling-gear gooseneck is broken. I am not surprised, because it had been made smaller than my specifications.

"28th April.

"At four a.m. I am able to put under way again.

"Toward noon ran into a dead calm. I repair a broken topping lift. At ten-forty p.m. a very strong blow (mistral) compels me to lower my mainsail. In a few minutes the wind turns to a storm. The sea becomes tremendous. I am dead tired, leave my boat

Westward to Gibraltar

hove to and turn in, sleeping until seven the next morning. The seas pound the boat all night and about every fifteen minutes a big wave comes crashing aboard.

“29th April.

“Very heavy sea. North-east gales that shift to west toward evening. I am very tired. At noon get under way again under stormsail and staysail, but the wind is too strong and I am making little headway against it. My jib halyard breaks and my jib tumbles into the sea. At the risk of my life, with towering green seas breaking over me, I rescue it.

“30th April.

“End of gale. The glass rose afterwards and for twenty days I had hardly any wind.”

The 1st of May, sixth day out from Cannes, was a very exciting one. After some days between sea and sky, when observations and calculations tell one land is near, it is

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

always a source of breathless wonder to discover land exactly where it ought to be.

In going aloft at noon I was able to discern a small cone rise from the water. That was land exactly where it ought to be. I felt proud of my navigation, although the navigator's work is nothing compared with the sailor's work. Soon many other cones appeared on my port bow. To the eyes of an inexperienced sailor they would have seemed to be many different islands, but I knew they were peaks a thousand to three thousand feet high whose bases were joined under the horizon. There, at least forty miles away, was Minorca, the second in size of the Balearic Islands.

The next day many more peaks appeared, this time ahead, and toward evening the whole island of Majorca rose from the sea. Then the wind became a very little breeze and on the morrow I was able to distinguish smoke from chimneys on land and the houses. For some days I followed Majorca's northern shore, tacking against a head wind.

Westward to Gibraltar

I shall always remember the wonderful vision I had one morning of a small estuary between peaks over four thousand feet high covered with snow. Sailing near the land I suddenly discovered the little old village of Port Soler on the flank of the mountain overlooking the river, and found myself in the midst of a fishing fleet of small sailing boats putting out to sea.

The fishermen were seemingly very surprised to see among them a small white yacht flying the French flag, but I went about, turning towards the open sea and carrying with me the wonderful vision of those old houses on the flank of the rugged and arid mountain. Villages, towns are no more to us sailors than are to the ordinary traveller houses seen at the corner of a road. We pass and carry with us a souvenir.

During the numerous days of calm which followed I glided slowly between those islands of beauty—Dragonera, Iviza Formentera—blessing that light breeze which permitted me to sail slowly in sight of their

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

marvels. So faint was the breeze that I was not averaging more than fifteen miles a day.

At last one morning, the 15th day of May, I saw towering out from the mist a monstrous rock presenting geometrical lines. It was Gibraltar's eastern side, which one cannot contemplate from the sea without a sentiment of awe, so much has man's work altered nature.

Toward noon I rounded Europa Point, and entered the naval harbour as a gale of the Levant was rising. I dropped anchor gaily near Vanderbilt's fine three-masted schooner, which in 1905 won a famous trans-Atlantic yacht race. I had completed the first part of my cruise.

I was boarded at once by the police, the port's doctor and the naval authorities. Everybody was very much surprised to discover that I was alone and had come from France.

Less interesting was an army of ship chandlers who tried to board me with their small launches. To rid myself of their im-



THE LAST SIGHT OF GIBRALTAR



THE "FIRECREST" IN GIBRALTAR DOCKYARD

Westward to Gibraltar

portunities, I had to explain to them that I was a mere sailor and that I had no money.

I was surprised to see very few warships to represent the glory of England on the seas—only two destroyers and a depot ship bearing the once famous name, *Cormorant*. I would have liked to have seen Gibraltar in Nelson's day, when the warships were beautiful frigates with white sails, when the seamen were real sailors. Nowadays, the modern seaman is more or less a mechanic, driving a train on the water. The trading-sailing ships are giving place to steamers, only some fishermen and yachtsmen continue the tradition and keep the science of handling ropes and sails on the open seas.

During the two weeks I spent at Gibraltar I worked hard fitting out for my long passage. The British authorities were very kind to me; I was allowed to enter the Royal Navy dockyard and use its workers. In the evenings I used to walk in the wonderful public gardens of Alameda between the green-flowered narcissus, which can be seen

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

nowhere else in the world, and look towards the sea and the North African shore.

At last I was ready. Before weighing anchor I sent to some friends the following postcard:

80 gallons of fresh water
80 pounds of salt beef
60 pounds of ship's biscuits
30 pounds of butter
20 pounds of bacon
24 pots of jam
50 pounds of potatoes

with a small arrow pointed towards a mysterious destination and the indication of four thousand five hundred miles.

I wanted nobody to know what I was attempting, should I not be successful. Many friends knew that I was starting for a long cruise, but two only knew that I was trying to cross the Atlantic without landing between Gibraltar and New York.

CHAPTER IV

THE ATLANTIC

IT was the 6th of June at twelve that I left Gibraltar singing gaily—Hurrah, I am outward bound. The great adventure was only beginning.

Before leaving France I had purchased a wind chart. This purported to show the direction of the prevailing winds on the Atlantic. It indicated that a boat sailing south-west from the Straits of Gibraltar would soon strike the north-east trade winds which would carry him with fair winds south of the Tropic of Cancer which is at the twenty-third parallel and south of the Sargasso Sea. Thence, he would have to sail west, and wait to be south of Bermuda before going north towards New York.

Although that course would carry me far to the south of a direct course to New York,

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

and add many hundreds of miles to the distance to be sailed, I determined to follow it rather than to try to beat my way straight across the Atlantic against prevalent head winds. A straight line is the shortest distance for a steamer, but not the fastest course for a sailing boat.

A boat sailing from New York toward Gibraltar will meet westerly winds most of the way, and will have to cover just a little over three thousand miles. From Gibraltar to New York one has to sail at least four thousand five hundred miles. This explains the difficulty of the passage from east to west. Joshua Slocum, in 1895, and Blackburne, in 1902, crossed the Atlantic single-handed, from west to east, stopping at the Azores. The longest distance, covered without landing, was two thousand miles.

Nobody had ever attempted to cross the North Atlantic alone from east to west. Slocum had accomplished a remarkable feat in staying seventy-two days alone at sea in the Indian Ocean. I had always a great

The Atlantic

admiration for this famous navigator. I knew that my passage would last much longer than any of his, but I was happy at the thought of the difficulties to be overcome.

Aboard a sailing boat you never know when you will arrive, and it was this reason that made me carry four months' food. The winds eventually proved anything but fair, so that many times during the passage I congratulated myself on my foresight.

I left Gibraltar on 6th June, and it was an auspicious start, for the day was beautiful. When leaving the harbour the wind was very light, and I lay on deck basking in the sun, and dreaming of the days that were to come—of the joys, and possible hardships, that lay ahead.

I had unbounded faith in my gallant boat and a good deal of confidence in my navigation. I felt supremely fit, absolutely without anxiety, and with pleasant anticipation of a sunny run down the trade winds to the tropics, where I would find abundant sunshine, flying fish and possibly adventure.

The Fight of the *Firecrest*

So I took a last glimpse of the land, and of the noble rock of Gibraltar shining in the spring sun.

The light wind increased, so I trimmed in the sheets and lay my course from Algeciras Bay toward the Straits and the North African coast, and soon I was in the Straits rounding Carnero Point.

The fish were so plentiful that they seemed to be making the water boil. Porpoises gambolled about the boat, and sea-gulls dived in the midst of their schools. I should have been glad to have hooked a fish, but was sailing too fast to make the attempt worth while.

That evening, at six o'clock, the *Firecrest*, running before an east wind, passed Monoqui, an old Moorish fort, the last promontory of the European coast. Here I fell into company with two large three-masted schooners, and was delighted to find that the *Firecrest* could hold her own with them.

As night fell the wind increased, until it blew half a gale. A little later I could see

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the Tangier light. By ten o'clock it was blowing a full gale. The wind then suddenly veered to the south-west—dead ahead—and my first jib was blown to pieces. Then came a heavy downpour of rain. It being the first day of the cruise, I soon tired. I determined, therefore, to have a good night's sleep, come what might. So I hove to under close-reefed mainsail and staysail, went below, and turned in.

It was blowing hard, but the *Firecrest* was behaving beautifully in the confused seas of the Straits, heeling to the blast when her sails filled, and then rounding to she would shake most of the wind from her canvas. So she backed and filled all night, while I slept below, certain that whatever the night or morrow held in store my cutter would be equal to it.

On the second day out we encountered a strong south-westerly wind, dead ahead. At times it rained hard, and I could carry only close-reefed mainsail and storm jib.

I had had the patent rolling gear for reef-

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ing the mainsail repaired at Gibraltar after damaging it in the Mediterranean, but the *Firecrest's* jumps in the heavy seas soon broke off more of the teeth of the storm-wheel. For the rest of the voyage, therefore, it was necessary to lower the mainsail all the way, and to roll the boom by hand when reefing was necessary. The old mainsail then started to rip along the seams and I had to lower and repair it, otherwise it would have torn from luff to leach.

The next day was fine, so I set the repaired mainsail, second jib and the little gaff topsail. At noon I took the sun and found I had logged fifty miles in the first two days.

At two p.m. that day I finally lost sight of Cape Spartel on the African coast. I was now clear of all land and on the open ocean. The world of water was wholly mine.

It was the third day from Gibraltar that I met the trade winds. These were light at first, but increased very quickly to a gale, which lasted for a full week and then blew out.

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I had been waiting eagerly the first sight of a flying fish, and was delighted when, on the 10th of June, a small silver streak shot out of the water and flew nearly a hundred yards before it disappeared.

When running before the wind the *Fire-crest* could not steer herself under whole canvas. In this I was less lucky than Captain Slocum, who could, aboard the *Spray*, run many days before the wind without having to touch the tiller. The consequence being that during those first days of trade winds, and after steering in daylight for twelve hours continuously, being all the time careful to avoid jibbing, I became tired. I knew, too, that I must conserve my strength for longer battles with the elements that were to come. Therefore I heaved the boat to, shut the companion-way and went to sleep, but was out of my bunk promptly at five o'clock every morning to cook breakfast. This invariably consisted of porridge made from oatmeal, bacon, ship's biscuits, butter and tea with condensed milk.

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I was not long at sea before I discovered that I had been swindled by the ship chandlers at Gibraltar, where I had laid in most of my supplies. The salt beef was good at the top of the barrel, but farther down it was largely made up of bones and fat.

I had ordered a well-known brand of tea, but I did not get it. This meant experience, and in future I determined to inspect very carefully all the food taken aboard.

The cooking was done on an oil-stove in the narrow fore-castle. It stood on the star-board locker, swinging in gimbals so that, theoretically, the top would always be level no matter how the boat heeled or pitched. In practice, however, it sometimes failed.

The roll or list of the *Firecrest* was sometimes so great that the frying pan would frequently fall from the stove, which often meant a burnt bare leg. It may be imagined, therefore, that during a storm cooking was difficult.

In such a narrow place—so limited that a fat man could hardly turn around—it was

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difficult to move, and many times one was thrown with violence against the boat's sides.

Usually at six o'clock I went on deck, rolled out the reef from my mainsail, cast off the tiller-lashing, and gathered way again. Twelve hours of unbroken steering followed, during which from fifty to ninety miles was covered—a good average for a small boat.

Although it is very monotonous to steer twelve hours in succession, after the first day or two I never felt wearied. But it was necessary to be constantly watchful against jibbing in this strong wind, lest part of the rigging, or even the mast was carried away.

The time passed very quickly at the tiller, for I was always admiring that thing of beauty, the *Firecrest*, as she flew before the strong breeze.

Her clean bow was cutting the water like a knife, whilst a long frill of snowy foam lengthening astern marked her wake. I could often see the log I was towing, far astern, rise to the top of a wave.

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If the wind was not too strong I was usually reading one of my favourite books and soon the end of the day came. If I could not read I was dreaming; thinking of the beautiful poems of the sea, thinking of the artificial life in civilized countries, but always feeling happy and my own master.

The long daily task was soon over. Just before sunset I called it a day, hove the boat to, went below and prepared supper. This usually consisted of salt beef, rice and potatoes. I cooked my "spuds" in salt water to save my store of fresh, and found that the tang of the ocean gave them a delicious flavour.

The sea breeze was sharpening the appetite, and, of course, I could not lodge a complaint about anybody else in relation to the cooking. Supper over, I was soon in my bunk, and slept while the boat pitched to the seas.

Some extracts from the log book will give a general idea of life during those first days of trade winds.

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“Monday, 11th June.

“Strong north-east wind, cloudy, rough sea. Twelve-thirty, take a reef in foresail. Roll two turns in mainsail—in second jib, up storm jib. At noon, ninety miles by log in twenty-four hours. Strong wind has become a whole gale. Hove to at seven-thirty p.m.

“Tuesday, 12th June, seven a.m.

“Course south-west, strong north wind, by log at noon seventy-six miles. Very high sea. Hove to at seven p.m.

“Wednesday, 13th June.

“Hove to all night. Six a.m., course west-south-west; strong wind north-west; meet a steamer rolling violently.

“Thursday, 14th June.

“Strong breeze north; by log at noon fifty-four miles; latitude by sunlight 34 degrees 21 minutes.

“Friday, 15th June.

“Fresh wind, blue sky, by log at noon sixty-eight miles. At one p.m., the bobstay breaks. Had difficult task repairing it.

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(The bobstay is a wire rope that fastens to the stem just under the water line and runs to the end of the bowsprit.)

“To repair it had to cling to end of the bowsprit. (That is one of the worst places on board a small craft when the seas are running high. One is likely to be washed off as the boat dips her bowsprit deep into the green seas and lifts it again.)

“Had to work with both hands and cling on with legs. Several times the *Firecrest* dipped me under completely. (What did I care! The ocean was not cold, and I had no clothes on to bother me.)

“(I recall to mind an account I once read of a small boat discovered in the English Channel, after a gale, with nobody on board. In the log was written: ‘Have to go to the end of the bowsprit to make repairs. Shall I come back?’)

“*Saturday, 16th June.*

“Very fresh wind. By log at noon seventy-two miles. Two p.m., the foot of the

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mainsail rips. Have to take it in and hoist the trysail.

“Sunday, 17th June.

“Very fresh wind north. Course, south-east, at noon it is a whole gale. After observations find am six hundred and twenty miles from Gibraltar and forty miles south-west of Madeira, which I can't sight.

“This afternoon have run out of the trades. The gale has died, and the *Firecrest* wallows in an oily sea and a dead calm. Therefore, all the wet clothes and bedding are brought up on deck to dry.

“Monday, 18th June.

“Calm and oily sea. Am busy with palm and needle repairing sails. (After such rough weather there is always a lot of work aboard.) There is a rope to splice, a sheet to change. For this work is more important even than the navigator's. Had I not known navigation I might have been able to cross the Atlantic. But, had I been inexperienced

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in the repair of sails and ropes, I fancy I should have made no other harbour than that of all the missing ships. Astronomical knowledge would then have been of small value.”

CHAPTER V

ALARMING DISCOVERIES

WHEN well within the area of trade winds I was making very good runs, but on the 18th the breeze became very light and its direction changed.

Here, too, I met a large proportion of south-west winds, which are quite exceptional in this part of the Atlantic at this period of the year.

My wind chart showed that thousands of observations have been taken there in June and July, and that a south-west wind had never been observed. It is curious, therefore, that I encountered eight head winds in succession.

Another curious fact was the total absence of life. No dolphins, no flying fish. Water all round and the *Firecrest* and I alone upon it.

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The cruising books I have aboard mention a great number of flying fish north of Madeira. I awaited them eagerly to relieve the monotony of a meat diet. But I was far south of Madeira and only saw one two days after leaving Gibraltar.

During that period of light winds I made experiments by setting the sails in different ways in an endeavour to get the *Firecrest* to sail herself before the wind. Hauling down the mainsail and setting in its place the try-sail—a leg o' mutton sail without boom or gaff—and trimming the jib in flat, I at last found that she would keep her course without a hand on the tiller. For, if she broached to under the press of the trysail the jib would fill and put her back on her course.

This rig, of course, meant reduced speed in knots per hour, as the trysail was much smaller than the mainsail. But I could now let the *Firecrest* sail herself all night, and the twenty-four hours of sailing at reduced speed figured out at about the same as twelve

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hours of sailing with all the canvas she had been able to carry. From now onward I could get more rest, and suffered less from strain. I now had more time, too, to repair sails and do more thorough cooking. As a matter of fact, when the weather was fine, time was even found to read favourite authors.

If I had had more luck with the wind I could, had I wanted, have spent the greater part of the trip in the cabin.

I soon got used to sleeping very lightly, and lying in my bunk, with head against the panels some inches above the water line, I could appreciate the speed of the boat by the noise of the water against her sides.

By the motion of the boat, the proportion of rolling and pitching, I soon could tell at once whether she had changed her course, and jumped on deck to modify the angle of the tiller.

At this date I will quote from my log again.

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“22nd June.

“Good north breeze. Course west-south-west. Cold and cloudy. Am above the great depths (more than 3,500 fathoms). At noon, by log, in 24 hours 80 miles. Position by hour angle and meridian is latitude 30 degrees 4 minutes north, longitude 21 degrees 3 minutes. Calm all afternoon and night. Spent all afternoon in trying to solve the chess problems in *The Field*.

“23rd June.

“Very light northerly breeze. Course south-south-west. *Firecrest* has steered herself for last four days. Trysail became chafed by the balloon foresail sheet. Up mainsail, and, steering all afternoon with the feet, repair it.

“Sails are chafing so badly and needing so frequently to be repaired fear twine will not hold out. But what do I care! Shall use my blankets. By log at noon thirty-seven miles.

“24th June.

“Calm night. Light north-westerly. Went

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aloft to replace a topping lift block. Busy Sunday coiling ropes and making everything shipshape aboard. Have pumped the boat dry and found little water in her. Shaved with cream without using soap and water. The first warm day since Gibraltar. Spent a very pleasant Sunday working on deck without clothes and bathing in the warm June sun.

“25th June.

“Light northerly breeze. Course west-south-west. Sight some ‘Portuguese men-of-war,’ a sort of flat jellyfish showing a long blue fan as a sail. There have been many discussions by mariners about them. Some say they can only drift to leeward, while others have maintained they can actually work to windward like a vessel. From own observations of the shape and angles of their sail-like fans I conclude they are hove to and drift slowly to leeward.

“It is interesting to watch them capsize and right themselves again. Some are nearly

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a foot long. Remained on deck all day, bathing in the sun and reading. Am now thirteen days from Gibraltar and have covered about one quarter of the distance to New York.

“26th June.

“Light north-easterly breeze. Use my balloon foresail as a spinnaker, and steer all day. At noon the sun is nearly overhead. Towards evening feel giddy and head aches. By log at noon sixty-two miles.

“27th June.

“Light north-easterly breeze. Calm afternoon. The *Firecrest* makes very slow progress, but do not care. Life is good lying on deck under the tropical sun.

“28th June.

“Light easterly breeze. Sight for the first time three big fishes in the wake of the boat. They are the *Coryphenæ hippuris* of the scientist, called dorado by the Portuguese and wrongly dolphins by English fishermen. I admire their flashing colours changing from

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electric blue to green. At night get latitude from Polar Star and longitude from Altair.

"1st, 2nd and 3rd July.

"Strong southerly winds, rain, frequent squalls. Sea very rough and confused. Am steering south, again trying to find the trade winds. Notice that regardless of the barometer and the wind chart, I meet mostly head winds and get rough weather on Sundays.

"It is odd that the seas run so short here, in mid-Atlantic, where I expected to find the long ocean swell of which I have heard so much. I know well the choppy seas of the Bay of Biscay and the Gulf of Lyons; but here in mid-ocean the seas run shorter and choppier than any I have ever encountered. There are four or five waves to the length of my boat."

A very important event occurred on July 4th. For the first time two flying fishes landed on deck. They were little chaps, the biggest one only five inches long and the

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other a regular minnow only an inch and a half long.

They were fresh food, I hastened to fry them, and found them of a most delicate flavour and a toothsome morsel.

It later breezed up to a strong gale and the seas were constantly breaking on deck. I had to roll three turns in the mainsail. The wind also nearly blew my staysail to ribbons before I could get it in, and I had to put canvas covers on the skylights to keep the water out. The boat jumped viciously, and there was a heavy strain on the bowsprit. At last the starboard, wire masthead-runner broke, and I had to replace it with good old manila rope which I like a good deal better than wire.

It seemed just like a western monsoon, but who ever heard of such a thing farther north than Cape Verde. However, as I have said, everything seemed unusual when on board the *Firecrest*.

I ran into the trade winds again on July 6th and began to make better time, logging

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sixty-one miles that day. I noted, too, that I was on the edge of the Sargasso Sea, for I saw some of the weeds which collect so solidly in that great eddy in mid-ocean.

The boat was now one month out from Gibraltar and in longitude 31 west. All conditions were favourable and I had begun to feel gratified at my progress when, suddenly, I made an alarming discovery. Most of my supply of fresh water had spoiled.

Before leaving Gibraltar I had laid in a store of eighty gallons. About thirty gallons of this were in galvanized tanks beneath the floor of the forecastle, from which I could pump it to the galley. The remaining fifty gallons were in two water casks, one of which was lashed on deck, and the other stowed in a corner of the forecastle.

These two casks were new, and had been purchased in Gibraltar. It was their contents that had gone bad, for when I drew from both I found the water had turned red, and that it tasted too sour to use.

This disaster meant only fifteen gallons of

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good water with some two thousand five hundred miles yet to sail, and the prospect of being at sea for at least another month.

I therefore carefully estimated the probable number of days still required to reach port, based on the average speed thus far and the distance yet to sail, and I came to the conclusion that one small glass of water a day would henceforth be my portion; so I put myself on that short ration.

It was evident that the discoloration of the water was caused by the oak with which my casks were constructed. After some speculation I concluded that the cause was tannic acid, and that the casks had not been sufficiently soaked before being filled.

I carried a small apparatus to condense sea water, but needed all my fuel to cook. The sun at noon was nearly at the zenith. Every part of the boat was hot and dry, and nowhere more than the inside of my throat, and I should have liked to have drunk all day long at this stage of the trip.

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Daily and anxiously I scanned the horizon for clouds presaging the coming of rain. How welcome some of the rain squalls and rainstorms I had sailed through would have been; but the skies remained clear, and the tropic sun pelted its rays upon me without mercy. I had now to do all my cooking in sea water, and this only added to my thirst.

Although I had not killed the ill-fated albatross, I was haunted by the rhyme of the Ancient Mariner:

*Water, water everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.*

On the 7th of July I shaved and cut my hair, also repaired the mainsail which was constantly ripping. One of the topping lifts broke in a strong north-east squall. Next day my topsail was blown into ribbons, and without that headsail the *Firecrest* would not steer herself so well.

The Sargasso weeds were more numerous and clung to my log. Flying fish had dis-

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appeared. It was warm, much too warm. My thirst increased. I began to suffer from fever, and my throat swelled. From the salt beef cask came a very bad odour. Was I going to run short of meat too?

CHAPTER VI

IN THE TRADE WINDS

IT meant this, then, that on July 6th I had two thousand four hundred miles of ocean yet to sail, and when I discovered that I had only fifteen gallons of water left. I had been averaging about fifty miles a day, the consequence being that, even with fair winds, I faced the probability that it would require at least one month more to complete the voyage, and the possibility that it might take much longer. As a matter of fact, it was not till sixty-nine days later that I came finally to anchor.

It seemed a long time before rain fell in sufficient quantities to enable the refilling of the empty water casks. I had had to adhere to the minute ration of a cup of water a day, for I dared not always reckon on rain, and

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I did not, if I could help it, want to make a landing of any sort before reaching the American coast.

Meanwhile, there was plenty of work to be done, water or no water. The seams of the mainsail were constantly ripping when there was anything like a strong sailing breeze. There was not in it now a single seam which I had not sewn together once, and there were many that had been resewn several times, almost clear across the breadth of the sail.

July 7th stands as an example of a fairly busy day.

My log reads:

“Wind north-east, good breeze. Course of *Firecrest* west by compass. Shaved and tried to cut my hair. Cleaned the fo’c’sle and put everything shipshape. Boat steers self under trysail and headsails. At noon find I have logged forty miles in twenty-four hours. One p.m. repaired mainsail. Spliced port topping lift (rope that supports the main

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boom when the mainsail is lowered). At four p.m. wind hauls to east. Boat suddenly jibs while I am enjoying a little tea in the saloon. Altered course to south-west. Sargasso weeds more numerous."

Next day my jib topsail was blown into small ribbons and I had to go to the end of the bowsprit to recover what was left of it—mostly bolt ropes with a few rags hanging to them.

The *Firecrest* was now running before a strong easterly wind, and, by noon of July 9th, had reeled off seventy-two miles in the twenty-four hours. Though that was an average of only three miles an hour I was satisfied, for the boat was steering herself most of the time, though she did not do it so well after I had lost my jib topsail. It was the headsails trimmed in flat that kept her on her course.

I logged seventy-seven miles from noon on the 9th to noon on the 10th, and that night I moved into the forecastle to sleep there for

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a change, and try the folding cots. But I was wakened during the night by a cold douche in the face. Part of a wave had come down through the hatch which I had left open.

I was still, and at intervals, trying experiments with the sails to discover the best way by which to get the *Firecrest* to steer herself without hand or foot on the tiller. With a following wind I winged her out with the mainsail to starboard one side and the balloon forestaysail to port as a spinnaker. She ran well under that rig, but I had to watch her all the time. At night I took the mainsail in, and altered the course a little, letting her follow her bowsprit under forestaysail and jib.

Whenever the wind rose to a moderate gale something would give way. While I was mending the balloon forestaysail, the port steel wire runner, which steadies the mast-head when on the starboard tack, parted and I had to stop sail-mending to put good rope in place of steel wire. While I was at work

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on the new runner, the jib sheet pennants broke. Next day the bobstay parted again and I had to splice it. If I took in the mainsail to repair it I had to hoist the trysail in its place. Then, no sooner had I finished repairing the mainsail when the trysail would give way, and I had to be busy again with palm and needle.

I am not given to superstition, but Friday, July 13, was exceptionally bad. The *Fire-crest* rolled horribly, the seas ran very high, and things had been breaking aboard since dawn. Early that morning a big hole appeared in the forestaysail. I took it in and was letting the boat steer herself before the wind with the balloon foresail boomed out when the spinnaker boom broke, and fell overboard.

Walking out on the bowsprit to try to recover it I put my feet on the cross-tree (or whiskers) which spreads the bowsprit shrouds. It broke under me and I fell into the water, but I caught hold of the bobstay and managed to crawl back on board ship.

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All this time the boat was steering herself, and doing more than three knots. Had I missed the forestay I should have stayed alone in mid-ocean. After that the narrow deck seemed particularly comfortable!

That day I found my position as latitude 27 degrees north, longitude 38.15 west. I therefore decided that I had made enough southing and altered course from south-west to west. Taking into consideration all probabilities, and if my wind charts could be believed, I should have a fair wind till 32 degrees of northern latitude.

Having survived the calamities of Friday the 13th, I felt ready to face anything the next day, which was also France's national day. So I dressed the ship as best I could by running up the French colours, the flags of the Yacht Club of France and the boat's private burgee.

But by ten o'clock the *Firecrest* was tearing along before a gale from east-north-east, and a strong squall hit her. I had, therefore, to take in the balloon forestaysail

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to save it, and set the smaller staysail instead.

Waves which seemed at least twenty feet high came roaring over the starboard quarter, and swept the deck from stem to stern. It was hard work to keep the deck without being washed overboard, and by night I was tired out.

Under headsails only the *Firecrest* was steering herself so I went below and let the gale rage. Things were in a terrible mess below decks, for I had had no chance to clean up there for two days: but things were put in order before turning in. The boat rolled terribly all that night, and had I not tested her beforehand and found her well worthy of confidence, I should have thought that at times she was about to capsize. It was difficult to hang to the bunk, and I had to brace myself to keep from being thrown on the floor. Nevertheless, being fagged out, I found ways of sleeping and getting some sleep somehow.

When I went on deck the next morning I

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found the honest little craft holding as truly to her course as though a hand had been at the tiller. Yet landsmen wonder why a sailor learns to love his boat, and thinks of her as a personality.

I also found some flying fish on deck, so I breakfasted sumptuously on fresh food for the first time for many days. The next day there were more of them. Only a man who has lived on smelly salt beef and ship's biscuit can truly appreciate the delicious flavour of a flying fish.

All the following day we scudded before the gale, and on the morning of the 16th it abated to an extent which enabled me to proceed to the repair of sails. The staysail was torn and the sea was still running high, the consequence being that it was hard to ply the needle on the leaping deck. There was more water than usual, too, to pump out that day; for a good chunk of one of the big seas had come in through a half-open hatch.

From this point, a period of variable winds, calms and squalls, followed, and I was kept

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busy changing and repairing sails, particularly the balloon staysail, which had been badly torn in the heavy weather. This took three days to repair, steering with the foot while I sewed.

CHAPTER VII

THIRST AND THE DORADOS

IT was always very hot, and I always thirsty whilst the sun beat down, but I had to get along on that one cup of water a day, not a drop more. It was more than two weeks after I had found that I was short of drinking water before I managed to catch rain water in my sails. And on the night of July 17th a rain squall blew up enabling me to collect about two more pints of water to add to the small supply. I sat naked in the rain, and enjoyed its refreshing coolness. I also found relief during the day in the form of frequent baths on deck by dousing myself with sea water from a canvas bucket. It was refreshing, but unluckily the effect soon passed, and I would be as hot and thirsty as ever.

I had just finished repairing the fore stay-

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sail when the mainsail ripped for fifteen feet along a seam. There was therefore nothing to do but to haul it down, get to repairing, and set the trysail in its place. This meant twenty-four hours' work with needle and twine. To make matters worse I now began to develop a sore throat, and by the following day it was so badly swollen that I could swallow nothing but a little condensed milk and water. For four days this continued. By July 28th I was so weak from fever that I lowered all but the headsails, and went below and turned in, leaving the *Firecrest* to take care of herself.

Flying fish occasionally landed on deck, but I could take but little interest in them, for my throat was too sore to allow of eating anything solid. The tropical light, too, began to dazzle one. Many times, on looking towards the horizon, it seemed that land was ahead, but the delusion never lasted very long.

Sometimes, towards evening, small clouds would appear and take the fallacious appear-

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ance of white sails: whilst the inflammation of my throat seemed to sharpen thirst, till it became hard to keep within the allowance of one cup of water a day.

By the morning of 29th of July I was feeling a little better, but extremely weak after four days of milk diet. The handling of the sails in consequence took four times as long. I, however, steered due west all that day, and at night got a restful sleep, for the wind had died down and the sea smooth again. This calm weather lasted for a week, and it seemed as though the *Firecrest* had been caught in the doldrums. One calm and blistering day succeeded another, until it seemed as though the very brain was burning in the scorching heat of the tropic sun.

My conditions at this stage were anything but enviable. Rotten sails which required constant sewing and patching; a little bad water; fever and no wind. It gave no joyful feeling, but a certain sense of satisfaction in meeting and surmounting these obstacles. Perhaps I was over confident, but I knew

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that, before I reached the American coast, I would get wind enough—an anticipation which was more than abundantly fulfilled. An entry in my log at that time reads:

“Very hot, terribly thirsty. Should like to take a swim, but throat still so sore had better not.

“Have certainly lost the trade winds. This is the second time wind chart has lied. It promises fair winds to the 34th degree of north latitude. Only at the 29th degree and *Firecrest* lolling about in a greasy swell; sails idly flapping when set to catch the vagrant airs. If it had not been for the false promises of the wind chart would have gone farther south, and probably caught south-east winds.”

However, everything seemed unusual on this cruise. And, anyway, very few forecasts are ever fulfilled.

“Have had to throw overboard that cask of salt beef. The tropics are too hot for it,

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and I can no longer stand either the taste or smell.”

Playing around my boat were great numbers of small fish, the name of which I did not know. They had big heads in comparison with their bodies, in fact, were nearly all head with a small beak-like mouth. I tried in vain to hook them, but they would not bite. I managed to spear one of them, but found he contained almost no eatable flesh.

On the 1st of August my throat was well enough to make it safe to take a swim. The depths overside were clear and cool as any lake, and the *Firecrest* lay rolling idly to a long undulation from the west. So I plunged over the rail and enjoyed the refreshing coolness of mid-ocean.

It had been calm all day, and the sunset was glorious. Some faint streamers of cloud spread fanwise out from the west, far up toward the zenith, in fleecy rolls and balls of vapour such as the seamen call “mare’s tails,” while others were in the form of a

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fish's scales. As the fiery sun dipped into the ocean, its rays first touched it with crimson until the whole western horizon was aglow with the brilliance of it.

I watched this glorious sight until night came down and Venus hung over the horizon.

Above blazed the brilliant Vega, and more to the west was Altair, whilst in the south was Antares, meshed in the long legs of the Scorpion. It was well worth coming three thousand miles to witness.

Then for two days came a strong northerly wind in which I could barely lay my course due west. The rotten sails again began to rip, and once more I was forced to bring out my twine, needle and palm and set to work.

But despite the heading winds I was slowly making my westing, and by August 2nd—54 days out—I was in west longitude 53.44 and north latitude 29.50. This position figured out at about 1,700 miles from New York. I had shaped my course to pass far south of the Bermuda Islands, but in this strong, heading wind and rough sea the *Fire-*

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crest made little headway. Rain fell in torrents that day, but it was impossible to catch and store any of it in my water-tanks for the spray was flying over the *Firecrest* in clouds and all the water I caught would have been brackish from it.

There was no time for idling now. I was constantly busy with needle, twine and marlin-spike repairing damages.

The *Firecrest* carried a double topping lift, but despite the two ropes to support the main boom one or the other frequently broke, and had to be spliced, or new ones rove off. The main gaff had to be hoisted between them, and, as they were only about eight inches apart, this was a fussy and aggravating job, especially as the boat was thrashing about in a rough sea with the gaff swinging. The place for the crew in hoisting the mainsail is near the mast, but when hoisting I had constantly to run aft and guide the end of the baffle between the topping lifts.

Again there came warm and pleasant weather. The boat steered herself, and I

Thirst and the Dorados

would constantly lie on deck peering over the rail, lazily trying to pierce the depths, some three thousand fathoms down. It was then that I noticed, for the first time, three dim shapes following my boat. Swimming several feet under the surface, in the *Fire-crest's* shadow, were a trio of dorados, a species of mackerels, but attaining a length of nearly five feet.

More than two weeks before I had thrown away the salt beef, and I had not tasted fresh meat since leaving Gibraltar. The flying fish had constituted my only change of diet. And there, swimming just beneath, were many pounds of good fresh fish. My mouth watered in anticipation of a horse-mackerel steak. The idea more exciting than any gale.

Getting out a hook and line I tried to catch one, using a small flying fish as bait; but they paid not the slightest attention to it. And this, despite the fact that right ahead of the boat the flying fish were flying, and the bonitas jumping high after them. The big ones were as swift as lightning, and the fly-

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ing fish had but little chance of escaping them. And even if they do the sea crow and albatross are waiting for them in the air.

So I asked myself if the dorados feed on flying fish why will they not bite at mine? This extreme shyness of the dorados for a covered hook was noted by my friend, Ralph Stock, in his *Cruise of the "Dream Ship,"* and by William Washburn Nutting when crossing the Atlantic in his *Typhoon*.

But I wanted those fish, and, somehow, I had to get one. But how? I tried shooting them with a rifle and managed to hit one, but he sank so quickly that even if the boat had not been moving I could not have caught him by diving. I tried to spear one with my granes—a sort of harpoon with three prongs—but they keep well out of reach.

In despair I gave up, and sat on the rail dipping my bare feet in the water, and it was then that the unexpected happened. Three dorados made a simultaneous dash for my toes. They were mighty quick, but luckily I was quicker. My harpoon transfixed one,

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and soon I had him, a three-foot fish, gasping and jumping on deck.

Here, at last, was fresh food in plenty, and, what was more, I now knew the way to catch more. For it simply meant that dorados were curious, and to catch one you had to attract its attention.

But soon they got used to seeing sunburnt feet trailing alongside, and I had to invent a fresh lure. First I tried trailing a white enamelled plate in the water. This succeeded in stirring their curiosity anew, and very soon I had more of them than I could eat.

The colours of these fish as they lay dying on the deck of the *Firecrest* were amazing. Their electric blue bodies, with long golden tails, passed through all the hues of the rainbow, finally becoming fixed green with gold spots. It was one of the many marvels of the sea of which I had read, but had never before seen.

Next day I had bonita boiled for breakfast, fried for lunch and boiled for supper. This meant by far the largest part of a three-foot

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fish. Next day I caught more of them, but many escaped my harpoon. They followed the boat, however, and through the clear water I could see plainly the wounds I had made in them, which gave me an uncomfortable feeling, for I had marred without attaining my object.

They are excellent food, but they have not the delicious flavour of the flying fish, upon which they feed. I found in the stomach of one at least a score of flying fishes' wings.

That day also I discovered a curious kind of marine growth on the side of the boat. It looked like black and white flowers held to the hull by a long, rubber-like neck. It was for this reason that many fish were following the *Firecrest*. They like a boat with a fouled bottom.

I now had an abundance to eat, but little to drink, and as I had to filter all the water I drank through a cloth it tasted infernally bad.

CHAPTER VIII

STORMY DAYS

THEN the blessed rains came. I can hardly describe how welcome they were. I dreaded to drink even the scant allowance of water I permitted myself, for it was getting dangerously foul from the heat and long storage in a tank.

Black clouds gathered on the western horizon on the night of the 4th of August. In the gathering dusk they rose mightily from the sea, like huge mountains of pitch frowning down upon the little boat as though bent on engulfing her in some awful disaster. But I could laugh in their face, for I knew the sturdiness and seaworthiness of the *Firecrest*. So I thought, "Let them come on, and I hope they will bring rain." Forked lightning zigzagged across the piled up mass, and the

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towering peaks of utter blackness that reared themselves above it, lighting the glassy ocean with a ghastly, blinding glare.

I sat on deck, admiring the display of natural forces gathering for an outburst of wrath. Though it was impressive to a sailor, and might have been even alarming to a landsman, I had little fear of what was to come. Clearly I was in for a summer squall, and after the long, torrid days and sweltering nights the prospect of a change was a pleasant anticipation.

That vast curtain of cloud rolled up over the heavens, blotting out star after star as though to hide a tragedy about to be staged in that remote part of the world, where the *Firecrest* and I awaited the onset. There was practically nothing to do but to shorten sail and prepare to catch any rain that might be coming.

Very soon I heard the comforting patter of raindrops on the deck and in the sea, and I was reminded of the sailorman's saying:

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*When rain comes before the wind,
Topsail sheets and halyards mind.*

The *Firecrest* was soon made all snug, and when the squall came she reeled under it, but when the first fierce onslaught had passed I was able by lowering the gaff and lifting the boom, to transform my mainsail into a sort of big pocket to collect and drain the water into the cask at the foot of the mast.

These rain squalls continued all night, so that I managed to catch and store ten gallons: a much more important asset to me even than the catch of fish, for I now felt assured that I should not lack either food or water, for the sea brought one and the heavens the other.

I was therefore now quite contented, even happy, and in no hurry to get to New York; in fact feeling quite at home on the high seas.

The wind was still west, and dead ahead, which meant slow progress, but pace was not a consideration. It was now more than three weeks since I had had a fair wind, despite the

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promising arrow on the wind charts. But I had plenty of fish, and water enough for present needs, besides which black clouds encircled the horizon, giving promise of the latter element.

It soon seemed to be evident that I had eaten a little too much fish during the last few days, for head and legs ached, and I was presumably suffering from fish poisoning. The *Firecrest* was now thrashing heavily into a choppy head-sea, and making hardly any headway.

That night, the 7th of August, I became quite ill. Body and legs ached so much that I could hardly sleep. Next morning the wind increased, and a very rough sea was running; but at noon I had logged off sixty-six miles in twenty-four hours—a fairly good showing against wind and sea.

I also noticed clouds high above moving against the wind, so concluded I was in for a spell of bad weather. The lacing which held the mainsail to the gaff now broke in several places, and the thimble at the clew of the jib

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pulled out of the grummet. More repairs to be made!

Two months had now elapsed since I had left Gibraltar, and thus far the cruise had been all that I had anticipated. From day to day I looked forward to new adventure, and such hardships as I had so far encountered had been only those which any seaman on old sailing ships would have expected as part of the day's work.

It had been definitely proved that the *Firecrest* could be easily handled alone, and that if I fell ill she could look after herself—given the proper sails. We were good companions. She did her part of the work and I did mine, the consequences being that I felt an increasing fondness for her. She was surely a gallant little craft and fulfilled every expectation.

It was true that I had some one thousand five hundred miles yet to sail before I could drop anchor in New York harbour, but when one had sailed some three thousand miles another one thousand five hundred, with

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plenty of food and water, held no terrors, in fact only a pleasant prospect.

But I did not know what kind of weather to expect as I headed more northward toward the north Atlantic coast, and felt perhaps unwarrantably confident that whatever came the *Firecrest* would be equal to it. But I had hardly anticipated the gales and hurricanes that were to lie in my course, as if waiting for the oncoming of the staunch little cutter and her rotted and ragged suit of aged canvas. As it proved the worst was yet to come, and I sailed confidently and in blissful ignorance to meet it.

The navigation of the boat was, of course, an important part of such a deep-sea cruise, but it was actually the least exacting of all the many tasks that come to hand. I found it a great deal more important to acquire good seamanship "before the mast," in other words, to be able to repair sails and splice ropes, than to find the boat's latitude and longitude. As a matter of fact I believe a man who did not know how to figure his lati-

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tude and longitude at all could cross the Atlantic alone provided he knew how to handle his boat. Steering west by his compass he would not very well miss the broadside of America; he would have to hit land somewhere, unless his compass played him tricks.

Apropos of this, the late Frank Norris gave in his book, "Shanghaied," a very curious description of a boat's navigation. He shows us Moran of *The Lady Letty* lying on her back on deck to bring a star to the horizon, then rushing down below and spending all night covering the four sides of the log-table with figures. "In the morning," he says, "she had found her position, and rated the chronometer." Surely Frank Norris would never have written such stuff had he been a sailor.

When taking an observation the navigator of a small craft must stand as high as possible above deck to decrease the error of observation. Instead of looking toward the sun or star one looks through the telescope of the

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sextant toward the horizon, and sees the reflection in the mirror of the celestial object: and once the observation is taken not more than a few minutes are required to find the position.

The difficulty is, when taking an observation in a gale and rough sea, when the deck is heaving underfoot, and the boat reeling and pitching. Then the lone navigator has to cling to something with his bare feet, and it's handy to have the feet bare for that purpose, for both hands are of course needed to handle the sextant.

Assume that one is ready, instrument in hand. Where is the horizon? A tall wave rears its head across one's vision and the horizon as viewed from the deck seems high in the air. Only when one is on the top of a wave can one see the real horizon. But one has usually time to get its sight before a big wave breaks aboard to bury self and sextant in spray.

But the sight has been got before one's balance is lost, and a clutch is made at

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anything to save one from pitching overboard. When the observation is taken one hurries off below to take the Greenwich time from the chronometer.

Now comes the navigation table, but I found that a well founded mathematical mind was very badly needed to calculate at all while the boat jumped and tossed upon the surges.

In any case I found that if one could locate oneself within ten miles of one's actual position, it was good approximation on a small boat.

CHAPTER IX

NIGHTS AT THE TILLER

TWO months ago I had left Gibraltar on the four thousand five hundred mile voyage alone across the Atlantic by this long southern route. For two months I had neither seen, nor spoken to, a living soul. My readers may imagine that this long period of loneliness might be depressing, but I did not find it so. The fact that there was no one to talk to never seemed to make the least difference. I suppose I was accustomed to my own companionship, and, very likely, such contentment was in a large measure due to the tremendous fascination the ocean held for me.

Most of the time was fully occupied in repairing the ravages the wind made in the aged suit of sails the *Firecrest* displayed to it. These were constantly ripping out at the seams, the consequence being that I was kept

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at work on them for hours at a time on a slippery, sloping deck, and engaged half the time in bracing myself to meet the heel of the cutter.

A whole new suit of sails could have been made for the *Firecrest* with much less effort had I carried the spare canvas, but, as it was, I had barely enough to make patches. My stock of needles also was getting low, and I feared that my twine would not last until I reached port.

Owing to the bad condition of the sails I had often to shift them. To make and take in sail to suit the varying conditions of calm, light breezes, or gales was quite enough, but, in addition, I had frequently to haul down one sail to repair it and set another in its place.

Beside this work there were two meals a day to cook, so that little time was found for reading though the library shelves were well stocked with tales of seas adventure. When night arrived, too, I was over tired to read, and fell into my bunk half asleep. Sleep had

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to be very light, however, for when the wind shifted I had to jump on deck to modify the tiller's angle.

I had strange dreams too. Sometimes the incidents of my dreams were land happenings, but the idea of reaching my aim never deserted my sleeping mind. I would often be engaged in a dream argument with myself. "If I am on land I have not crossed the Atlantic. Then why have I not started?" Then I would find to my joy that I was aboard the *Firecrest*. A glance on deck would follow to see that everything was well, and off to sleep again with the satisfied feeling that the boat was getting nearer its destination.

Very often during a calm day I took my sleep, and if, towards evening, the wind strengthened I passed all the night at the tiller. It is always difficult to fight against sleep, but I never felt bodily weary during those long hours.

The *Firecrest* was, under such conditions, sailing slowly, heaving astern a phosphores-

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cent wake, and I occupied in steering by a star. At such a time, alone upon the sea, gazing at the celestial dome, I often pondered on the smallness of man, the imperfect theory of evolution, of the Newton and Einstein theories, of the various histories of the world which claim that the earth is getting gradually colder and that the man started from a very low level to progress to his present high state of civilization. All these theories and systems seemed, out in mid-ocean, only hypotheses emitted by men because they explained better than others the phenomenons which our poor powers allow us to register during our era.

Often the different incidents of my own life passed before my memory during those quiet hours, with all the details which have cropped up to modify my conception of life, and which had actually influenced the present day situation by which I found myself at the tiller of my little boat on the wide night-shrouded ocean.

A great sensibility, and the deceptive ideas

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of a youth fond of ideals obliged me early to be my own companion; then came the sad life for such of a border at school, the war, and my mother's death which broke up the ordinary outlook on life. The war memories are still before me. Fight high above the clouds; the incendiary bullets which pierced my winds; the hostile machine brought down in flames; the temporary joy of triumph. But back on earth I am nothing but a child who has lost a mother.

Time somehow did not fill the emptiness. One after the other my best friends had died in the air. The armistice came, but I was thinking of those dead flying pals some of us forget too easily; of the vanity of the survivors who wear rather ostentatiously the medals celebrating a victory which really belongs to the dead. For when one has not given his life for his country one has not given everything.

Many other incidents in life passed before my memory. Some apparently of no importance, but which, in these surroundings left a

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deep impression. Nor do I know why I was once suddenly brought to an incident three years ago.

I was in a train de lux^e going towards Madrid, when, glancing through the window, I saw a young beggar. He was running bare-foot alongside the rails. His brown skin was shining between the rags which covered him. He was more beautiful than the young beggar depicted by Murillo, more realistic than the club-footed child of Ribeira. He was begging like one does in Spain, for he seemed to grant a favour instead of asking for one. He was a prince of life this dirty and ragged beggar, running free in the sunlight, and far happier than the travellers the train was carrying in its luxurious interior.

I felt I should have liked to have been in his place, and to have started my life again fifteen years ago—I who am always roving in quest of youth.

At any rate I felt I was master aboard my own boat, and could go on roving round the world looking for the open air, the great

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spaces and adventure; leading the plain life of a seaman, and bathing in the sun a body and mind not content to inhabit the houses of men.

So now, happy to have found my *métier* and to have nearly fulfilled my dream, I recited at the tiller my favorite sea-poem.

The night thus passed quickly. One after the other the stars faded. The grey dawn broke in the east and I was again able to distinguish the shape and lines of the *Firecrest*.

CHAPTER X

FIERCE GALES IN THE HURRICANE ZONE

THE 9th of August, sixty-four days out from Gibraltar, found the *Firecrest* about five hundred miles east of the Bermuda Islands, and approximately one thousand two hundred miles from New York, my port. So, judging by experiences thus far I reckoned that it would require about one month more to complete the voyage; but, at the same time, I knew the past was no guide to what there might be to come.

I felt sure that strong westerly gales lay between my present position and the American coast, a forecast that was amply and fully realized. In fact, I had a taste of what was coming on that very day.

There had been rain squalls and a very confused sea all night. The wind was westerly, very strong and dead ahead. I had

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shaped my course to pass south of Bermuda, and cut the Gulf Stream so far south as to get the benefit of its north-easterly current in carrying me up to New York; so I laid the *Firecrest* on the starboard tack and headed her south-west.

During the forenoon she lay practically hove to under forestaysail while I repaired several rips in the mainsail, but by the afternoon, when I was ready to set it again, the wind had increased to a gale.

The seas were running high and broke on board frequently throughout the afternoon. The deck seemed constantly under water. The narrow little cutter lay heeled over before the blast as she drove into the seas, burying her lee-rail at times several feet under water.

The deck sloped like the roof of a house and I had to be careful in moving about. One slip and I should have gone overboard to leeward, and the cutter, with no one on board, would have gone on her way leaving me food for sharks and bonita.

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The deck was so badly washed that I had to keep the skylights and hatchways closed. This made it hot and uncomfortable below decks. Cooking under such conditions was a difficult task. My forecastle was just wide enough to stand in between the stove on the starboard side and the water casks and the galley on the other.

If, in a thoughtless moment, I set down a cup or dish it was likely to be hurled spinning across the forecastle on to the opposite locker or the floor. My stove, too, had a habit of tossing a kettle of water, or a dishful of hot food, on my bare legs and feet; so I had to watch it carefully when the cutter was pitching about.

That day a huge whale swam swiftly across the bow of the *Firecrest*, making the spray fly in a turmoil. The monster was making approximately ten knots, and was very likely running before the swordfish, his natural enemies.

The gale continued throughout the night. I had put the *Firecrest* on the other track,

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heading north-north-west, and, after trimming the sails so that she would hold to that course, let her take care of herself while I got what sleep I could in a bunk that seemed to be trying to leap from under me.

I was up at four o'clock the next morning, and got on deck just in time to get the mainsail down before a heavy gust that whipped the sea into flying scud, and would surely have stripped the *Firecrest* of her canvas.

It was dirty weather. A vicious wind was driving before it huge waves with high curling crests like Kipling's white horses, and which bore down upon my lonely little craft as though bent on her destruction. When she plunged into them she buried her bow under a smother of frosty green water that raced along the deck and flew in a sheet of spray into the sails.

A great canopy of dull, leaden clouds hid the heavens from horizon to horizon, and battalions of stray storm clouds scurried past at lower altitudes, whilst gusts of rain pelted my face with stinging force.

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I was drenched; washed alternately with spray and rain; but it was warm and I wore little clothing. In fact, clothing was of little use under such conditions, for it only would have served to keep me constantly wet. Without it I quickly dried off.

But there was nothing to lament over. This was the kind of weather I had expected; the kind that puts to the test a seaman's skill and endurance, and the staunchness of his craft. Far from being either distressed or awed by the majesty of ocean in a wrathful mood, I felt thrilled to the sense of combat. Here was something to fight, a worthy foe-man, and I found myself singing snatches of all the sea songs I could remember.

For a soft and gentle breeze,

I heard a fair one cry.

But give to me the snoring breeze

And white waves heaving high,

And white waves heaving high, my boy!

The *Firecrest* was plunging as though bent on becoming a submarine, and heeling heavily

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to the gusts. The gale was blowing straight from the direction I wanted to sail, and she had to fight for every inch she gained against it.

She was not making too bad weather of it, except for the strain on the bowsprit. She was constantly burying it deep into the sea and prying it out again. As she flung it clear of the water I could feel the whole rigging, mast, bowsprit and sails, jump, and the cutter shake from the sudden release from tension. My faith in the bobstay was weak, and if it gave way in one of those jumps the bowsprit might go by the board.

The waves were running so high that it was difficult to make an observation. Only when the cutter topped the crest of a sea could I get a glimpse of the distant horizon, even when the flying cloudwrack above opened to give me a chance to shoot the sun. However, I satisfied myself that I was in latitude 32.54 and longitude 56.30.

Going below, I discovered that the *Firecrest* was shipping a considerable amount of water.

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Yet the skylight covers were closed as tight as I could get them, and all openings shut. But the covers lifted enough when the seas broke over them to let a little water in each time. The result was that everything below decks was becoming saturated.

The gale veered to the south-west in the afternoon, but showed no signs of diminishing. At seven o'clock I undertook to reef the staysail, but it got loose and was ripping from foot to leech. It was difficult to make and take in sail or do anything on deck with the boat leaping about and so often raked with the seas; but I managed to get the staysail below and roll the boom so as to show less mainsail.

Tired and soaked as I was I could not afford to rest while the staysail was split. It was too necessary; so I stayed up nearly all night sewing it together again, and it was two o'clock next morning before I turned in. There was a succession of squalls throughout the night, so I let the cutter lie hove to,

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riding as easily as possible, but making no headway.

Next day the gale blew itself out, leaving a rough sea running. From now and for about twenty-four hours I had moderate weather, and took advantage of it to ply my needle repairing staysail, mainsail and trysail by turns.

On Monday, August 13th, my observation showed that I had logged only about forty-five miles in twenty-four hours. I could not make much westing against these gales which were carrying me north of my course.

By the afternoon of that day the *Firecrest* was tossing in another fierce wind and rough sea. She laboured and pounded and buried her bowsprit in the solid green seas, putting a great strain on that stick and bobstay.

I was convinced by this time that a long bowsprit, such as the *Firecrest* carried and the main gaff (boom across the upper part of the mainsail), were a couple of nuisances for a man sailing single-handed. I determined,

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therefore, to get rid of the gaff once I reached New York, and to carry instead a Marconi, or leg-o'-mutton mainsail, which should be balanced by a shorter bowsprit.

At last I gave up trying to repair one of the staysails, as it seemed likely to take all my twine.

Fierce seas broke over the cutter all that night. Next morning everything in the forecabin was wet from the water that had been driven in around the hatchway. On deck at four o'clock I found the *Firecrest* plunging into a strong head sea and trying to make what headway she could against the strong westerly gale. There was a good deal of water on deck most of the time, as the seas still broke over her.

The barometer was very low, indicating that conditions were going to be worse. Throughout the forenoon the gale kept increasing until at eleven a.m. its force was tremendous, and things were in sad disorder below decks owing to the battering the little boat was receiving.

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I had had difficulty in cooking breakfast, and was vainly attempting to boil rice for lunch when a green sea broke aboard and the kettle of hot water was tossed from the stove on to my knees. Going on deck to see what damage had been done, I discovered that the wave had carried away the hatch cover of my sail locker, a compartment in the extreme after part of the boat.

Holes were beginning to show in the main-sail and staysail; so I had to take them in. This seemed a good opportunity to try out my sea-anchor, so I let her ride to it, with a spit-fire jib to steady her. I found, however, that there was little difference in the boat's action and that she could do nearly as well without it.

Many seamen claim that a sea-anchor is a great help in heavy weather when the winds are so high that it is impossible to carry any canvas to hold the vessel's head to the wind, but I did not find it so with my type of boat.

My experience appears to have been the opposite of nearly all that has been written

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about boats in heavy seas. In any case I think the so-called danger of being caught in the trough of the seas does not apply to such a small boat as the *Firecrest*, for I found it didn't matter much whether she was head, side or stern to the wind and seas when she had no way on. If she could carry any canvas at all, I gave her a reefed trysail and a spit-fire jib and found the motion easier.

It was necessary to cover that sail locker hatchway with something to keep the water out, so I plugged it with old sails in the best way I could.

Attempting to cook supper that night, the air pump on my stove, which forces the oil through a small hole in the burner, broke, and I had to give up cooking. Also, although dead tired, I spent nearly the whole night repairing the staysail.

The storm clouds cleared away next morning, August 15th, and the gale moderated a little. I had been letting the *Firecrest* ride to the sea-anchor while repairing the sails, but, just before noon, I hauled in the anchor with

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tripping line, got the mainsail and jib on her, and by noon was under way again, steering north-west.

This was the last occasion on which I used that sea-anchor. It had proved of no real use; so why bother with it?

Within twenty minutes after getting under way a squall struck the cutter and tore to ribbons the staysail that I had been working on for ten solid hours. It was gone in a twinkling.

The joke was certainly on me, and I was obliged to smile at the thought of all the hours spent sewing those rags together only to have them whipped away in that fashion. Then I hoisted a jib in place of them.

By this time I had been without sleep for thirty hours. The *Firecrest* was taking care of herself, so I turned in and got a two-hour nap. Next day, in more moderate weather, I put things shipshape down below, throwing overboard the things I had found useless. This always gives considerable pleasure, for it is one of the joys of the sea that you are

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not obliged to keep with you things you dislike.

Dorados were still trailing the boat, but they were now too shy to be lured within reach of my harpoon. On the following day, however, I managed to coax one near enough to spear him. He was a foot and a half long. I thought of my actual superiority, but I thought, too, that some stormy day these voracious fish might have their turn in reward of their tenacity in following me.

The *Firecrest* was logged some fifty to sixty miles a day in the variable weather that now followed. Frequent squalls, often with heavy rain, kept me busy handling sails.

On August 18th the gales came on again; my sails began to rip; parts of the rigging broke under press of sail, and the leaping of the cutter added to my discomfort. The pump got out of order, too. The seas were also running high, and by night-time I was cold, wet and tired, so took some quinine to ward off a chill.

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The irony of it all was that after having been on short rations of water for a month I was now getting so much that I could not get rid of it. It was also impossible to keep the heavy rains and spray from coming through the sails with which I had plugged the sail-locker hatch.

The water had now risen to the level of the cabin floor, and, when the *Firecrest* listed, it splashed around in the lockers and bunks, wetting and spoiling everything.

On deck it was blowing a regular hurricane. The sky was entirely obscured with thick clouds, hanging so low and thick that it seemed like night. I had to reef the mainsail down until nothing was showing but its peak, the jaws of the boom and gaff being only four or five feet apart. The seas became so high, and the boat labouring so heavily, that it seemed at times as though she would jump the mast out of her. The rain, too, came in slanting torrents, driven before a stinging blast and almost blinded me. Facing it I could hardly open my eyes, and when I did I

Fierce Gales in the Hurricane Zone
could have hardly seen from one end of the
boat to the other.

For several days now I had been exposed to
drenching rain and spray, the consequence
being the skin of my hands had become so
soft that it was very painful to pull on the
ropes.

CHAPTER XI

THE TEST

NEITHER the baffling gales that ripped the sails and set the lockers awash, nor exposure to drenching seas and cutting rains were sufficient to burn the sea-fever out of my veins. A man crossing the ocean alone must expect some distressing times. Sailormen of ancient times, who rounded the Capes of Good Hope and Horn, had to fight for their lives and suffered more from cold and exposure. I had a feeling, too, that there was a pretty good chance that some day the *Firecrest* and I would encounter a storm that we could not weather.

The gale continued throughout the night of the 19th of August. Sea after sea swept over the little cutter, and she shook and reeled under them. I was awakened often by the shock of the seas and the heavy listing of the boat.

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It was a dirty looking morning on the 20th, and the climax of all the gales that had gone before. It was the day, too, when the *Firecrest* came near to making the port of missing ships. As far as the eye could see there was nothing but an angry welter of water, overhung with a low-lying canopy of leaden, scurrying clouds, driving before the gale.

By ten o'clock the wind had increased to hurricane force. The seas ran short and viciously. Their curling crests racing before the thrust of the wind seemed to be torn into little whirlpools before they broke into a lather of soapy foam. These great seas bore down on the little cutter as though they were finally bent on her destruction. But she rose to them and fought her way through them in a way that made me want to sing a poem in her praise.

Then, in a moment, I seemed engulfed in disaster. The incident occurred just after noon. The *Firecrest* was sailing full and by, under a bit of her mainsail, and jib. Suddenly

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I saw, towering on my limited horizon, a huge wave, rearing its curling, snowy crest so high that it dwarfed all others I had ever seen. I could hardly believe my eyes. It was a thing of beauty as well as of awe as it came roaring down upon us.

Knowing that if I stayed on deck I would meet death by being washed overboard, I had just time to climb into the rigging, and was about half-way to the masthead when it burst upon the *Firecrest* in fury, burying her from my sight under tons of solid water and a lather of foam. The gallant little boat staggered and reeled under the blow, until I began to wonder anxiously whether she was going to flounder or fight her way back to the surface.

Slowly she came out of the smother of it, and the great wave roared away to leeward. I slid down from my perch in the rigging to discover that it had broken off the cutboard part of the bowsprit. Held by the jibstay it laid in a maze of rigging and sail under the lee-rail, where every sea used it as a battering

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ram against the planking, threatening, at every blow, to stave a hole in the hull.

The mast was also swaying dangerously as the *Firecrest* rolled. Somehow the shrouds had become loose at the masthead. There was now a fair prospect that the cutter would roll the mast out of her, even if the broken bowsprit failed to stave the hole it seemed trying for. The wind cut my face with stinging force, and the deck was, most of the time, awash with breaking seas.

But I was obliged to jump to work to save both boat and life. First I had to get the mainsail off her, and, in trying to do so, found the hurricane held the sail so hard against the lee topping-lift that I had to rig a purchase to haul it down with the downhaul; but I finally managed to get it stowed.

It proved a tremendous job to haul the wreckage aboard. The deck was like a slide, and the gale so violent that I had to crouch down in order to keep from being wrenched off the deck and hurled bodily into the sea. I clung desperately to the shrouds at intervals.

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The broken part of the bowsprit was terrifically heavy, and I had to lash a rope around it while it was tossing about and buffeting the side. Several times it nearly jerked me overboard.

At last I had the jib in, and the bowsprit safely lashed on deck; but it was nearly dusk and I felt worn out. That whipping mast had, however, to be reckoned with, and I could take no rest till at least an attempt had been made to get it tight. So, going aloft on the shaking stick, and clinging to it as it swung from side to side, I speedily discovered that the racking which held the port shrouds in a sort of eye had given away.

Twice I was swung clear of the ship, still clinging to a rope, to be dashed back against the mast with a bang. After nearly losing my hold more than once I found that I was too exhausted to make repairs that night, so slid down to deck to find the whole boat vibrating from the shaking spar.

I feared the deck might soon be opened under the strain of it, so, to steady it, I

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hoisted a close-reefed trysail, and filled her away on the starboard tack, in order to let the starboard and undamaged shrouds take the strain. I then hauled the clew of the reefed staysail to windward, and hove to.

With this nursing she rode a little easier, and the slatting of the mast was not quite so severe. It was now nearly dark and the gale seemed to be moderating a little, so I went below to get supper.

But when I tried to start a fire, neither of the two primus stoves would work: so I had to turn in, hungry, cold, drenched and exhausted, for the first time on the cruise sad, fagged out and fed up.

At this point Bermuda lay only three hundred miles south, but New York at least one thousand miles away. I knew, too that it would be good judgment to head for the islands, and make repairs there before going on to New York; but I had set my heart on making the voyage from Gibraltar to the American coast without touching at any port, and to abandon that plan was heart-breaking.

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So much did I feel upon this point that I think I should not have cared if a wave had swept over us and carried the *Firecrest* to the bottom of the sea. I tried vainly to sleep. The mast was still slatting about so hard that I feared it would either tear up the deck or carry it away. For some hours I stayed in my bunk thinking the problem out with aching head, and then suddenly decided to try the seemingly impossible.

I got up again, and, as I needed food badly, began to work at the stoves. I filed down three sail needles and broke them, one after another, before I could get one small enough to clear the hole through which the kerosene was fed to the vaporizing burner. And it was nearly dawn before I got the burner working, but I was then able to cook a breakfast of tea and bacon.

This dispatched I began to feel ashamed of the indecisions of the night before. I felt ready for the battle again, and I determined to sail through thick and thin to New York, the goal of the trip.

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On going on deck again I found that, though the gale had moderated a little, it was still blowing hard, and the sea tremendous.

The mast had to be steadied at all costs, and the damaged rigging repaired. It was hard to climb on the swinging stick, and it was harder to stay on it at all. With legs around the crosstrees I had to work head downward. In that position it took me more than an hour to put a racking seizing around the two shrouds where they came close together at the masthead. Then, dropping down to the deck, I set the shrouds taut with the turnbuckles just above the rail. The mast was now as safe as I could make it.

But there was still the broken bowsprit to repair, and I found it was a job for the carpenter's saw and axe. With these tools I cut a slot in the broken end of the stick, slid it into position and fastened it there with the iron pin that originally held it in place. This gave me a jury bowsprit eight feet shorter than the original one.

As it proved, however, the hardest part of

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the job had still to be done, for I had to make a bobstay to hold down the end of the bowsprit. This I did by cutting a piece from the anchor-chain, and shackling it into a ringbolt fixed into the cutter's stem just below the water line. To do this I had to hang head downward from the bowsprit, near the stem, to reach that ringbolt under water. The consequence being that as her bow rose and fell she alternately dipped me two or three feet under water and brought me out dripping and sputtering, to repeat the dose again and again.

I don't quite know how I managed to complete the job, but it certainly had to be done, and, at the expense of many unwilling drinks of sea water, the shackle was got into place and bolted there.

As though in sullen irony no sooner was this work finished than the gale suddenly moderated. It was just as though the elements were acknowledging that they were defeated, and were surrendering to the gallant little craft.

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Taking advantage of this milder weather I made two observations, and located myself in latitude 36.10 north, and longitude 62.06 west. My position was thus about 800 miles from New York as the crow flies, but about 1,000 to 1,200 miles of actual sailing distance.

Although utterly exhausted I was sustained by a keen sense of satisfaction. So much so that I went to work repairing the pump, and soon found the cause of the trouble. A bit of a match had stuck in the valve, and this out I got it working again. After two hours of pumping the boat became clear of water, for I could hear the pump sucking dry; always a joy to a seaman's heart.

Going aloft to make sure the standing rigging was secure, I found the stays had chafed against the mast. It would therefore require careful handling to bring the mast into New York whole. Under the shortened bowsprit and reduced headsails the *Firecrest* was badly balanced, so that when I set the mainsail again I had to reef it by four turns of the boom in order to be able to steer at all; the

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consequence being that when sailing close-hauled she made much leeway.

I had, however, finished the repair work, so, lashing the tiller, I set my course for New York, and then fell exhausted on my bunk.

I had been, in succession, yacht hand, cook, rigger, carpenter, skipper and navigator, and, although absolutely done, was rather pleased with myself in consequence.

CHAPTER XII

THE GULF STREAM AND A LINER

BUT the gales had not done with us yet for they lasted another four days, and my log book reads as follows:

“22nd August.

Three a.m., rain squall. Five a.m., wind freshening. Seas beating aboard. Eight a.m., seas increasing. Ten a.m., rain squall. Twelve, seas very confused. Port topping-lift broke. Spliced it. Mainsail again opening at the seams. Three p.m., strong rain squall. Four p.m., wind increased to a strong gale. Sea very rough. Boat behaves beautifully. Wind west-south-west. Course north-west.

“Running short of potatoes. Had dinner of five potatoes boiled in salt water. Will have to live mainly on rice soon. Seven p.m.,

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hurricane. Wind blowing and whistling furiously. Am obliged to heave to. Sky very dark and threatening to windward. Took in working jib. Gale so furious that the jib tore in the operation.

“The sea is getting warmer now. Must be in Gulf Stream.”

Next day bad luck gripped me. I spent most of it in repairing sails, but at ten a.m. I lured a five-foot bonita alongside and speared him with my granes. As I hit him he leaped clear of the water and I had to let go my harpoon to avoid going overboard. That meant there would be no more bonita steak for me, and it happened just at a time when I needed all the food I could catch. But I was partly compensated by a flying fish that alighted on deck.

It was now the twentieth day of these gales. I was constantly soaked with rain, and was constantly drugging myself with quinine.

Had another giant wave, as that of the 20th of August, swept over the *Firecrest*



THE "FIRECREST" ALONGSIDE FOET TOTTEN PIER, LONG ISLAND, SHOWING BARNACLES ON THE HULL

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whilst she was disabled by the first, she might have been left a dismantled little hulk on a trackless sea, hundreds of miles from the paths of transatlantic liners. But it might have still been possible to have made New York, some months later, by using the boom for a mast, with a short squaresail set.

That huge sea had, however, proved itself a "fair-weather wave," as the seamen say, for it actually marked the height of the storm, and forecasted the coming of less boisterous weather.

For twenty successive days now, the *Firecrest* had fought against squalls and gales, and finally the hurricane that almost ended her cruise. And the little cutter certainly showed the scars from the battering she had suffered.

Jagged rips, outlined with long rows of stitches, ran zigzag across her sails. The reefing gear of the main boom had broken long ago. One of her hatches had been washed away and the jury bowsprit so re-

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duced her headsails as to put her sail plan quite out of balance.

But crippled as she was, I was intensely proud of her!

Designed, built and rigged, for racing, she had proved herself a splendid cruiser, sound and able, and as nearly unsinkable as such a craft could be. The marks of my handiwork were on her sails and rigging from the jib tack to the mainsail clew. Yet now all looked neat, trim and seaworthy.

Unable to make much westing against the gales and the Gulf Stream, the *Firecrest* had been driven northward several hundred miles from Bermuda, until she was now almost in the latitude of Nantucket Island, but some three hundred and sixty miles east of it.

We were now actually crossing the Gulf Stream, and nearing the course always made by the great liners between New York and European ports, so I began to look expectantly for their clouds of smoke; their towering hulls by day, and the blaze of their lights as they swept past at night. It was also

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getting cold, by which I realized that I was now out of the gulf.

My throat was quite sore, and badly swollen, when I turned out at four a.m. on August 25th. But the never-ending damages to my sails had to be repaired, no matter whether well or ill.

As I was repairing the lacing of the trysail to the mast a vicious rain squall hit the *Fire-crest* and ripped the stitches along the luff. So I took it in and made for shelter below decks, leaving the cutter to take care of herself under her headsails.

Of course a rain squall at sea is a very minor incident provided it does not catch you with too much sail set, and so beat the boat down with the first gust.

By noon I had the trysail repaired, and got my position by sun and chronometer as longitude west 60.07; latitude north 38.18. This showed that I had actually been losing some westing, but I was contented to let her head northward in order to get out of the contrary current of the Gulf Stream. There

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came a strong west wind after the squall, and, as the sky cleared, it showed patches of the most radiant blue. Under the trysail and headsails the *Firecrest* was now making splendid weather of it, and continued to do so until late in the afternoon when the wind moderated and she was able to carry the mainsail again.

Next morning, the 26th, I found two flying fish on deck, and that day I had another feast on their delicious flesh, for the last time. The wind had in the interval shifted to north-west, so I put the cutter about and shaped our course west-south-west, and nearer to the direction of New York. Most of the day was now spent in putting things in order, and repairing the mainsail, which ripped again. By night a dead calm had developed.

One of the odd spectacles of the sea, a waterspout, and the first one I had seen on the voyage, was put on, apparently for my benefit, on the following day. A lively squall swept past about a mile distant, carrying a low, black cloud. Connecting it

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with the ocean was a sturdy column of water drawn up in corkscrew fashion as the whirlpool of wind lashed the sea. I had a splendid view of it, but it was impossible to see where the water ended and the cloud began, and in any case it passed roaring away to leeward.

Although I was now fairly far north, the bonita still followed the boat, and on August 27th I shot one with a rifle in the hope of retrieving him, but it did no good, for he sank like a stone. The flying fish also had vanished, so with no harpoon to kill bonita and no flying fish, I was reduced to a diet of cereal, bacon, rice and potatoes.

Next day the wind was fair, and allowed of the balloon forestaysail being rigged out as a spinnaker. I was thus able to make more westing, and by noon I was in west longitude 65.39.

I noticed that the water and fish were of a different colour, and that the seaweed was different. I must therefore have crossed the Gulf Stream. I also found the patent log to be out of order. It was probably full of salt

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and needed boiling in fresh water. The land was evidently getting near, for the sea-gulls were from now onward much more numerous.

That night, August 28th, I sighted, for the first time, a steamer passing westward, with all her lights blazing. After months of isolation it was a strange sensation to find other ships on the sea. Evidently the world of water was no more my own, and in consequence I felt a little sad as I watched that liner speed on her way.

I was now actually in the steamship lane, for next morning, August 29th, I spied another steamer, and through the glass I made out her name and her port. I began to feel, therefore, that the *Firecrest* had made a gallant fight and was nearing her home. When the steamship was near enough I started semaphoring with my arms, and this was the message:

“Report yacht *Firecrest*, eighty-four days from Gibraltar.”

It was rather difficult to do because there was a heavy swell running, and I had in con-

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sequence to cling to the rigging with my legs and feet whilst I waved my arms. But they did not seem to understand my message, so slowed their engines and came nearer.

From the bridge, the captain, using a megaphone, asked me in broken French and English what I wanted. I had no megaphone, but shouted that I did not want them to stop, but only to report me in New York. That I was only out for a sail, perfectly happy, and needed nothing. But with a thousand immigrants lining the rails, and all talking at once, I could not make myself understood.

The passengers seemed to be excited, and surprised to see a small boat and lone mariner at sea, they consequently kept calling out in Greek. I was sorry then that I had not brought a set of international code signals, for I should have enjoyed a joke at their expense by signalling, "What can I do for you?"

I tried to signal to them to go on their way, but the steamer came nearer, dangerously near. Her great hulk took the wind out of my

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sails so that I could make no headway, and we promptly drifted together. The *Firecrest* bumped against the steamer's steel side, and her mast barely reached to the lower deck of the big immigrant boat.

This bumping against the liner's side placed my little boat in greater danger of being sunk than by any of the storms she had weathered. They threw me a line and I made it fast to the mast. Then I called out to them to haul the cutter forward so that I could get her out of her present dangerous position, but was horrified to discover that they had started their engines again and were towing her!

In vain I shouted to them to cast away; that I wanted no help to reach New York. But when I drew my knife and started to cut the rope they finally understood and cast off the tow line. I had now some steering way. The cutter's sails filled, and she drew away.

I was just congratulating myself on escaping when I noticed they were lowering a boat, so I hove to and waited. Two young Greek

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officers, shining with gold braid, came aboard, bringing food, and asking if I needed it. I told them I had plenty of food, but accepted their gift since they were kind enough to bring it.

One of them demanded why I had not steered the *Firecrest* when they were towing her, and undertook to show me how to handle my boat. This rather annoyed me, so I replied as gently as I could that a sailor, and not a mechanic, should know that a sailing boat cannot steer with no wind in her sails!

One of these youths wrote his position on a piece of paper as longitude 62.30 west, latitude 41 north. My own observations had shown my position as longitude 66.39, latitude 41. I was therefore startled to note that there was a difference of some two hundred miles. When I told them of my own observations they at once insisted theirs were correct. It then occurred to me that my chronometer might be wrong, after being tossed about for so many days at sea. In any case I could not be sure that my own was right;

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I therefore kept the two positions in my log book. Later on I learned that mine was correct, but I shall never know whether the young officer had made a mistake, or whether the liner was in error as to her position.

As my visitors were leaving to go back aboard their ship, I discovered that the food they gave could be of little use. It consisted of three bottles of brandy and canned fish, which I don't like.

At any rate the steamer went on her way with her immigrants cheering the *Firecrest*, which I answered by dipping my flag.

After this incident the horizon was soon free again, and I was pleased to be alone.

CHAPTER XIII

FOG AND THE END OF THE CRUISE

THEN came three days of calm and fog, with the *Firecrest* right in the sea-lane of the transatlantic liners. Nevertheless I managed to sleep peacefully nearly all the afternoon of the first of these days. Toward the evening, however, the siren of a steamer warned me to be on the look-out, and for a time I kept blowing on my fog-horn. The steamer passed close, but was invisible.

At this stage all my fine weather sails had been blown away. This fact, together with the additional ones that the hull was covered with seaweed, and that I was under shortened sail resulting from the broken bowsprit, meant that little headway was being made.

I was in a real danger, too, in the dense blinding mist which was now blanketing the face of the ocean; and I have no words to

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describe the melancholy of those days, which were little different from the nights.

So thick was the fog that I could not see the mast from the stern. The steamship's siren came wailing out of the fog like a plaint, and my own fog-horn seemed to be a sort of death-knell. But despite it all I was most of the time sleeping and gathering strength after those shrewd days of continuous gales.

On the third day of the fog spell the situation got on my nerves, and I began to think, for a little while, that eventually one of the liners must run me down. I could hear one siren approaching apparently straight at the cutter from astern, whilst all this time the *Firecrest* had practically no steerage-way by which to get her out of the steamer's course. There was nothing to do therefore but to keep the fog-horn going in the hope that the look-out man would hear it; and, for a few minutes, it seemed likely that I might share the supposed fate of Captain Slocum, the famous single-hander, whose small boat was believed to have been sunk in a fog.

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Fortunately my horn was heard and the liner signalled that she would pass to starboard.

That day I took an observation, and found that the *Firecrest* had made twenty miles in twenty-four hours, and this although there had been no wind at all. It was fairly certain, therefore, that there was a tide setting westward, and that I was getting nearer land.

There were more signs of the nearness of land on the following day, Sunday, September 2nd. The colour of the water had changed, porpoises were plentiful, and there were dead butterflies on the water. I knew for certain now that my navigation was correct.

All that day, and the one following, the *Firecrest* sailed slowly westward. Toward three o'clock in the afternoon of Monday, September 3rd, I noticed that the gulls were unusually numerous. The reason soon became evident, for, on the horizon, three miles distant, was a fishing schooner, followed by a regular cloud of gulls.

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The wind was very light, and for two hours I sailed toward the schooner, she herself being right on my course. At about four o'clock her dories went back aboard, and she headed towards the *Firecrest*, so I hoisted my flag. The schooner passed near enough for me to read her name, the *Henrietta*, of Boston.

The crew was busy dressing cod and hali-but, but the skipper sent a dory to the cutter. A French fisherman from St. Pierre came on board, and quickly showed his astonishment when he learnt that the *Firecrest* and I were coming from France. I was promptly asked to come aboard and partake of their dinner. So, leaving my boat steering herself, close-hauled and on her course, I went a-visiting at sea.

I found the *Henrietta's* deck waist-deep in fish, and as I looked about her cluttered deck, and watched the fishermen at work dressing the catch of the day, I was vividly reminded of the descriptions I had read of the sights on board the *We're Here* in Kipling's *Captains Courageous*.

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The crew all gave me a smiling welcome, and I was glad to be among them, and to listen to their peculiar Boston accent. Somehow I felt far more at home with these fishermen than with the Greeks on the liner, for these were real sailormen.

Down below, where the table was set, I, for the first time in ninety days, tasted fresh bread, butter, fresh meat and pie. As may be imagined I had never enjoyed a meal so much. They then offered me food for the boat, and I gladly accepted some melons, bread and butter.

The meal over I went on deck and had a yarn with the skipper, Captain Albert Hines, who was at the wheel steering the schooner after the *Firecrest*. It was an odd sensation to see my boat sailing away, and holding her course, with nobody on board; so much so that I began to be a little fearful that the *Henrietta's* engine might stop: for close-hauled in a light wind I scarcely think the fishing schooner could have overhauled the cutter.

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Skipper Hines proved a fine old sea-dog, and it was a keen pleasure to meet a man like him, knowing as he did the sea and his boat. He gave me a chart of Georges Bank, the great fishing ground east of Cape Cod and Nantucket Island—over which we were sailing—and a ball of twine to repair my sails. I also confirmed from him, to my satisfaction, that my position, as obtained from my own observations, was absolutely correct.

By this time the fog had commenced to shut down again, and at times it hid the *Firecrest* from my sight. This being so, I felt anxious to get back on board her before I lost her altogether. So a couple of the fishermen rowed me over, and I gave them the bottles of brandy the officers of the steamer had given me. They then rowed back to the *Henrietta* when we exchanged some farewell blasts on the fog-horn, and as we were doing so the schooner faded out of sight in the mist. This visit to the *Henrietta* had been a pleasant break in the voyage.

If the *Firecrest* had now had any wind I

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should have been sailing up Long Island Sound within a few days, for it lies only about two hundred miles from Georges Bank, but the days that ensued were generally calm, with catspaws, now and then, to fan her along for an hour or two, and then leave her rolling in an oily calm.

The tide, too, ran strongly over the shoal, carrying the *Firecrest* backward and forward like a shuttlecock, and whilst this game was being played I filled the time by repairing my staysail and mainsail, and, most of the time, I was in sight of some fishing schooner or other.

Using the chart Captain Hines had given me, and sounding constantly with the lead line, I gradually worked my way through Nantucket shoals. Passing over these I one day sighted a couple of small whales, little chaps no bigger than the *Firecrest*.

It was on the morning of the 10th of September that I sighted land, Nantucket, for the first time since leaving the African coast, a few days out from Gibraltar. But I cannot

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say that I gave a cheery cry of "land-ho." On the contrary, I felt a little sad, for I realized that it stood out there forecasting the end of my cruise; that it meant that all the happy and strenuous days I had spent on the open seas would soon be over, and that I should be obliged to stay ashore for several months. No longer would I be king of all I surveyed, but amongst human beings and a sharer in civilization once more.

On the following day I sighted the Island of No Man's Land, and sailed through a fleet of innumerable, small motor-fishing-boats. On Wednesday, the 12th of September, I had the pleasure of meeting at sea part of the United States' naval fleet manœuvring off Newport. It was a wonderful sight, and I watched with the keenest interest the swift destroyers moving in line at a speed of more than thirty knots.

I had decided to approach New York through Long Island Sound, as I did not want to pass through the Hudson River.

For the first time in three weeks I found

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a good sailing breeze off Block Island, and by evening had entered the Sound, passing through the Race. So I sadly bade good-bye to the old ocean.

There were plenty of passing steamers now. The Sound liners, all ablaze with lighted windows, and electric lamps on deck, tore past all night, often with strains of music that came to me sweetly across the star-lit waters. After a lone cruise such as this had been these lighted steamers at night possessed a certain fascination.

No longer could I allow the *Firecrest* a free helm to steer herself with at night. We were too near land, and I had a course marked by buoys and lights to follow. So near the goal, I was afraid to fail.

From now onward for two days I sailed along the beautiful north shore of Long Island, admiring the stately country houses and their green lawns. Then the Sound shores came closer together, and I was opposite the mouth of the East River.

So, at two o'clock on the morning of

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September 15th, I dropped anchor off Fort Totten. I had neither left the tiller, nor slept, for the last seventy-two hours, but the cruise of the *Firecrest* was ended, and just one hundred and one days after she had sailed out of Gibraltar harbour,

CHAPTER XIV

FIRST DAYS ON LAND AND THE SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

I HAD dropped anchor before an American fort, and at daybreak, soldiers helped me to lay the *Firecrest* alongside a wharf. At once a crowd of curious camera-men and reporters came aboard. They were all surprised to learn that I had come from France. The Greek steamer had reported me, but everybody had believed it to be the joke of a French fisherman lost on the banks. Many actually thought that I was a bootlegger.

I had not spoken to a human being for three months, but was now obliged to answer the endless questions of the newspapermen during a whole day. I also had to face the camera-men, and, though I had not slept for three days, was obliged to climb up the mast several times to please them.

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The privacy of my floating home was soon and constantly invaded by a crowd of visitors. I had to obey the tyranny of far Western civilization. And in this connection I well remember that it was painful to start the wearing of shoes again.

But I had lived too long in a world of dreams to be able to support for long the routine of daily life in a big city, and was constantly thinking of the happy days at sea. So strongly did these thoughts recur that, soon after landing, I was dreaming of putting to sea again.

But I still have many charming souvenirs of my stay in New York, nor will words tell what I owe to a certain captain and his wife, my first visitors aboard, who made my stay at Fort Totten a joy and a delight.

The American yachtsmen treated me like a brother. Bill Nutting, the hero of a famous passage across the Atlantic, became one of my best friends. Nor shall I ever forget a lecture I gave at West Point, when two cadets came and told me of their intention to

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leave the army and sail round the world in a small boat.

The American newspapers had been describing the cruise, but it was humorous, and even painful, to read the extraordinary accounts about it. Every newspaper seemed to want to print something new and startling, whether accurate or not, and in one I was surprised to read that I had on one occasion been unconscious for two days.

I was unknown when I landed, but on the morrow I found I had achieved a sort of bubble fame. Letters and telegrams began to arrive from everywhere, and were so numerous that an army of stenographers would have been necessary to deal with them.

Numerous, too, were the letters of friends, sincere friends, who were really pleased with the success of the cruise. But more numerous were the letters of strangers desirous to join me on my next cruise.

They were of all sorts, eccentrics who wanted to become famous, and boys and men

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sincerely attracted by the lure of adventure.

Very uncommon was the letter of the Californian girl, who wrote:

“I am apt to do everything which is uncommon. When I read about your daring exploit I felt that I ought to do something myself. You know that a man is supposed to have more courage than a woman. I am merely a woman, being only twenty years old, and I have just completed a hike from Los Angeles to Milwaukee, having walked alone two thousand miles. The darker the night the better I like to be alone. I enjoy hearing coyotes howling when I am all alone. . . . I don't know what it is to be afraid. One day I hope to go to Africa. I don't know what I shall do there, but I'll do what other people are afraid to do. . . .”

She concluded by saying that the job of cabin-boy would fulfil her dearest dreams.

Another American girl had certainly a curious idea of life aboard, for, having dem-

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onstrated that I could not again start alone, she claimed that she was very adaptable and that any job aboard from cabin-boy to "social secretary" would suit her.

Very keen seems to be the young girl who wrote:

"I have wasted twenty-five first years of my life regretting I have been born a girl and not a boy. Now I am going to act just as if I was a boy. To be a sailor, and sail out to the South Sea Islands has always been my dream. Of course I know that sailing alone with you will not seem very *comme il faut*, but why should we pay any attention to the conventions if we do what we think is right. If you have no sense of humour you will think I am mad, if you have some you will perhaps think the same."

Charming was the letter of a young French girl, who wrote to me from a restaurant, and wanted to sail with me to cook my meals and sew my sails.

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From Australia I received a letter written by an old French sailor, which contained a single five thousand word sentence filling sixteen pages, with numerous additions between the lines. I was never able to read the letter entirely. The poor lunatic wrote that he had been persecuted by the French consul, and that it was a great pity that the Channel Islands, which were so near the French coast, did not belong to the French. He suggested that I write to the King of England about it and that, after my exploit, he would be obliged to grant my demand. He added that he was writing at the same time to Sir Thomas Lipton to place before him one of his inventions for increasing the course and velocity of yachts which would permit them to get back the American Cup to Great Britain.

Another inventor proposed to use in place of sails a windmill-like propeller that he had designed.

Curious, too, is a letter from Geneva.

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“I am no more a young man, but I am still very strong. I am forty-eight years old, mineralogist, know all Nature’s laws, and I would like to explore unknown countries. As I saw in the newspapers that you are going to visit some virgin islands I am your man.”

The letter is signed—“A GOOD SWISS.”

All these letters, however, were not letters from volunteers. Many children sent their congratulations and these letters are very touching. They are, too, those one keeps and which give one the feeling that something useful has been done to raise the ideals of youth.

An eight-year-old child advised me not to sail towards the Pacific Ocean which he knew to be dangerous. He was seemingly terribly anxious about me.

Another young American schoolboy wrote that he thought of me when seeing an aeroplane pass above his window. Also, “I am going to work very hard to make a lot of

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money, buy a boat like yours, and wander round the world; but I must leave you and finish learning my lessons.”

A professor in transcendental sciences wanted to predict everything that was going to happen during my next cruise, but I could not accept his offer, for it would eliminate all the unforeseen—adventure’s greatest attraction.

All these curious letters are but a few among the many. But most of those I received were quite serious, and from people really attracted by adventure; people willing to give up their jobs to run risks; letters from people belonging to different classes of society; letters from sailormen, mechanics, students, and wealthy people. They seemingly wanted to give up everything, and to ask nothing in return. These letters were the hardest of all to answer.

A French officer in command of a destroyer wanted to give up the navy to serve under

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me. I naturally could not accept the suggestion, but felt very proud of the honour.

A commander in the Russian Navy wanted to ship as one of the crew.

Very brief and business-like was the following letter:

“I am an old sea dog, born on the northern coast of Norway, fifty years old, active as a young boy. Can do two things well. Sail a boat and cook. Can you use me?”

A volunteer I could have done very well without was one who thought he was qualified because he was very unhappy, and tired of life. In fact, he wanted to join me on a dangerous cruise hoping to lose his life.

The twenty-year-old mechanic had a high opinion of himself who wrote:

“I am afraid of nothing, and I have exceptional nerves. You can dispose of my life as you choose. Consider my proposition. It is worth it.”

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There was also the seventeen-year-old ex-schoolboy who gave himself a long and complete description.

“For many years I have been attracted by adventure. When I was still young I was dreaming of travels and wrecks. I gave up my studies, for I did not like the idea of working in a town. I am studying English and mathematics while I am waiting for an occasion to satisfy my savage tastes. I adore the sea, the pampas adventure, and the unforeseen. Unluckily I can’t give you a fortune for your expedition, but I will give you my instruction, my willingness and my friendship.”

I have many times tried to figure out the mentality of the young man who wrote:

“I have for you the greatest admiration. The reason is very simple—your character is exactly mine.”

There was also a wonderful polyglot sailor-waiter in a Duval restaurant, who

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knew navigation, could repair sails and was prepared to speak fluently, French, English, German, Italian, Spanish, Norwegian, Danish, Swedish and American.

Perhaps the plumber would have been a good companion, who has no knowledge of maritime matters, but was fond of running, and a keen cyclist. He offered me all he owned, two thousand francs, and good health.

Another volunteer seemed to possess a rare gift for scribbling which would help me to write my books. I have, too, often thought of the big things I could have done together with an old sea-dog who has been at sea for fifteen years, did not want any wages, and would follow me to death.

Another seaman, a volunteer of thirty, who had crossed the line twelve times aboard three-masted square-riggers. He gave descriptions of the dangers of the Pacific and of a typhoon in the Tonga Islands, wanted to follow me, and would not hold me responsible whatever happened.

I liked very much the letter of an Ameri-

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can boy who sent me his photo at the wheel of a Gloucester schooner, and wrote:

“I should like to go with you. I have been at sea aboard steamers, and I worked aboard a schooner for two months. Of course, I have papers to prove it. I am eighteen years old, five foot ten inches in height, and my weight is one hundred and fifty pounds. I am young, willing and I am not afraid of work. If you need money I think I shall be able to raise some, but of course a boy of my age cannot be expected to be very rich yet.”

Of what wonderful value in new surroundings would have been the quartermaster who had been at sea since he was ten years old, and had been four times round the Horn. He wrote:

“Take me with you. I am afraid of nothing. I shall always obey you. Back home we should be able to teach the French

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to love the sea. If you want it I am yours body and soul for this great task.”

An English boy, a salesman in a great motor-car firm, wanted to give up his job to follow me. He would have been, I think, a splendid companion.

“Although I have a good position I am wasting my life when the sea and adventure are calling me louder and louder every day. During the war I served in the navy aboard boats hardly bigger than yours, cruising on the northern coast of Scotland. I am longing for adventure, and to see the very islands to which you are sailing. Can you take me with you? I am prepared to face any hardship for the love of the enterprise. If I had money I would give you everything I own.”

I was especially sorry to have to disappoint the thirteen-year-old Irish volunteer, who wrote:

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“You will find me very useful when things have to be done in a hurry. I should prefer no wages.”

The letter is signed—“Respectively yours.”

When I re-read all these letters—letters which I shall always keep with me—I cannot help thinking of the great drawing power the sea has when so many strong and energetic men are ready to throw up everything for adventure upon it.

But if I actually took anybody with me it would be as a companion, for I should prefer to do all the work myself.

It was really sad to have to disappoint so many who evidently had a real fondness for the sea, and perhaps this letter from a French sailor was the most difficult to reply to in the negative. He wrote:

“I am longing for the sea. I should like to wander again on the immensity of the ocean. I should like to live again a sailor’s

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life, with its sufferings and its pains. I pray you to take me with you. I shall face without complaining the worst storms. I should like to be with you sharing your life and those days without a morrow. I ask nothing. I shall bring nothing with me. I don't want to bring back anything. I implore you to take me with you."

It was in any case the most pathetic letter I received, and has been placed between my favourite books, John Masefield's ballads and Bill Adam's short stories. It was a letter written by a real sailor, and one able to tell of his great passion for the sea.

The spirit of adventure to-day is anything but dead if one may judge by these few extracts.

CHAPTER XV

THE CALL OF THE SEA

NEARLY a year has passed since I landed in New York. And now, in a small French town by the sea, I am finishing the writing of this little book. I have just been walking along the seashore, looking out over the open ocean and a great contentment is about me, for I know that I shall soon be on the sea again.

I have also been thinking up again the numerous hardships of that last cruise, and am now wondering why I started, and still more why I want to start again.

The life of a single hand aboard a small sailing-boat naturally means very rough life. He is constantly exposed on deck; the wind cuts the face, rain and spray make the skin so sore that it becomes painful for a time to pull on the ropes. Under the tropical sun he

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has to suffer from thirst if water runs short. It is true that when the weather is fine he can rest and recuperate, but when many days of gales come in succession, he has neither the time to rest nor often the time to fully repair damage immediately it occurs. In fact his life whilst aboard is often a perpetual struggle of brains and physical strength against disaster.

There is no doubt about it that it is a hard life, and if I were to advise youngsters who might burn to imitate the lone hand, I should say, "Don't do it!" yet, I am going to sea again under such conditions.

Perhaps the comfort and luxury of early youth now asks for the counter-irritant of the plain life of a sailor with all its risks and adventure.

A great love of the sea, and nothing more, was the cause of this my first long cruise, and those whom I fancy believed that a beaten record or temporary fame was the motive were mistaken. For, as the famous poet Verhaeren wrote:

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*They did not understand the great dream
That charmed the sea with its voyage;
For it was not the same lie
That was taught in their village.*

No! I am not happy on land. I am constantly dreaming of the strong smell of tar, of the rough sea-breeze, and of the *Firecrest* waiting for me on the other side of the Atlantic.

Nearly three years ago I first went cruising in my little boat, and now the sea has taken hold of me. Whatever happens I shall always go back to the sea like the rover in Masfield's beautiful verses:

*I must down to the sea again,
For the call of the running side
Is a wild call and a clear call
That may not be denied.
And all I ask is a windy day with white clouds
flying,
The flown spray, the blown spume, and sea-
gulls crying.*

CHAPTER XVI

THE REJUVENATED "FIRECREST" AND FRESH PLANS

THIS is a sort of appendix for yachtsmen, telling of past experience with the boat and of the alterations which have been carried out on the *Firecrest* before starting on a longer voyage I am about to make, or upon which I shall have started when this little book is published.

I shall not try to pretend that the *Firecrest* is a perfect boat. In fact, there is not such a thing as a perfect boat. Each type, each form of hull, each rig has its advantages and disadvantages. The good sailor is one who knows his ship's good points and faults, who understands her behaviour in a storm, her reactions to the tiller. There are many good ships. Good sailors are not so

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easy to find, and often one could appropriately quote Kipling's verse:

*The game is bigger than the player;
The ship is greater than the crew.*

I was able to get from the builders in England the lines of the *Firecrest*. Designed by Dixon Kemp under the length and sail-area rule, she is rather narrow and deep for her length. The three and a half tons of lead she carries on her keel make her practically uncapsizable, but the strain on the mast and hull is certainly greater than it would be if she had more beam and not so much depth. Her general dimensions are: L.w.l., 39 feet 7 inches; w.l., 31 feet 6 inches; beam, 8 feet 6 inches; draft, 6 feet 3 inches; displacement, 12 tons.

She sails easily to windward even against rough seas and gales. She heaves to very well, working to windward a little more than she drifts. She is certainly difficult to steer before the wind when she is near her speed limit, which is about eight knots, although



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The Rejuvenated *Firecrest*

once in a gale my log registered thirty miles in three hours under a big squaresail.

The chief sources of trouble during my passage were the following: I could not buy new sails, the ones I was using were more than ten years old, and I had to repair them constantly. My bronze roller reefing gear was too small, and made of bad metal; it broke the second day out from Gibraltar. The bowsprit was too long; the bobstay broke many times. The fresh water kept very badly in the oak casks. The gaff mainsail was difficult to hoist and lower in a gale. The solid boom was very heavy. Since her arrival at New York the *Firecrest* has been laid up on City Island, and much work has been done to put her in the best condition possible. A new teak rail has replaced the one which was broken against the pier at Fort Totten in the gale which wrecked *Harpoon* last October. The rudder stock has been renewed, and she has been copper sheathed against the destructive worms of the tropical seas.

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I have adopted the Bermudan, or jib-headed rig, which will allow me to use a new nine-foot bowsprit, three feet shorter than the old one which was broken at sea in a hurricane. Instead of a bobstay, there are two bronze rods to keep the bowsprit rigid and suppress the strain on the masthead when she is dipping into a wave. The total length of the mast above the deck is forty-six feet. The topmast is hollow, twelve feet long, funnelled into the solid one, which is of Oregon pine, thirty-four feet long above the deck, and of a diameter of six and a half inches at the foot. The boom is hollow. Both hollow spars were made by McGruer, in England, of five pieces of wood cemented together. The boom is seven inches in diameter and twenty-seven feet in length. I am still using a roller reefing gear, but this time of galvanized iron; the genuine Channel pilot-boat type made by John Beara, Appledore, Devon. The standing rigging is all new, of plough-steel wire, and G. N. Buckle, who came over here three years ago from England

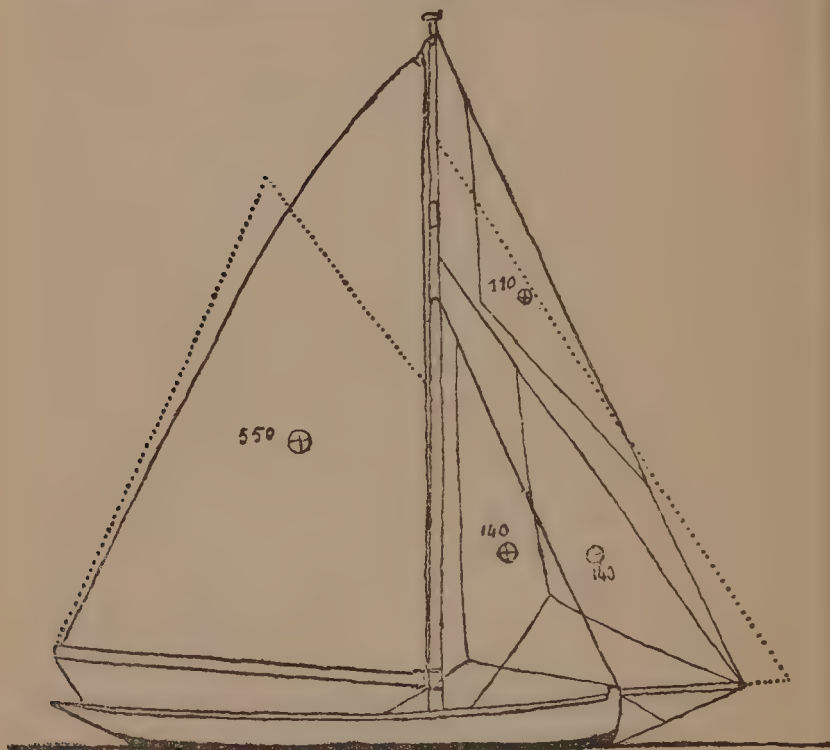
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on the *Shamrock*, made a beautiful job of it. The shrouds have individual splices this time, for I have not forgotten that day in August last year when the seizing parted and I nearly lost my mast. The forestay goes to the stem-head and topmaststay to the bowsprit end. I am using three-quarter inch galvanized iron turnbuckles. I like them better than dead-eyes and lanyards, which do not last very long in the tropics. There seems to be no more reason nowadays for using lanyards than rope shrouds.

The sails are all new, made of twelve-ounce cotton by Burrows, Inc., who took a great interest in them. The seams of mainsail and staysail run up and down with straight stitching. The mainsail is laced to a wooden batten on the boom, and has hoops under the spreader, and hooks on a wire jackstay above. The wire jackstay passes through the hoops and is spliced to an iron turnbuckle on the gooseneck mast-band. The luff rope is manila. I am carrying one spare forestaysail, as it is the most useful sail on

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a cutter, with hanks on the forestay, three rows of reef points, port and starboard sheets, no boom and no traveller. The jib is



PRESENT RIG OF THE "FIRECREST"
DOTTED LINES INDICATE FORMER RIG

set flying on a ring travelling on the bowsprit. The first, second and third jibs are made of flax, with two jib-sheet pennants, and port and starboard sheets belaying near the

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tiller. I am carrying a light jib topsail to use in the doldrums and variables, and hooking on the topmaststay. There is a balloon forestaysail, which is a very useful sail, and a storm trysail in case I should lose my boom, made of slightly stronger canvas.

All the running rigging is rope. It was intended to be of Irish flax, which is stronger for the same diameter than iron wire. As I cannot get in time, from Ireland, all the rope I need, I shall sail with the old rope and get all new Irish flax running rigging in Bermuda. I am using now Irish flax for the jib-sheet pennants and forestaysail sheets. There is one halyard and one purchase for the mainsail, and one halyard and one purchase for the jib, made of two-inch rope. The mainsheet is of two-inch manila and is rove through a double block on a swivel-band on the boom's after end.

It is my first experience with a Marconi rig, but I have great confidence in it. It was very difficult when hoisting my mainsail before to make the gaff pass between the two

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topping lifts. The wind pressure keeping the gaff against the lee lift made the operation of lowering the mainsail very difficult. When I wanted to set the trysail I had to get the boom on deck—one of the most difficult tasks on a single-hander. The hollow boom and jib-headed mainsail will suppress all those troubles. The boat will not roll so much before the wind and will be easier to steer with a hollow spar. She could not steer herself before under mainsail with the wind on the quarter, but she could under the trysail with the jib hauled flat. Now she should steer herself with a jib-headed sail and a hollow boom. I have also invented a new device to keep her on her course in any wind, and I am going to experiment with it between New York and Bermuda.

Now that I am publishing the lines of *Firecrest*, I suppose all the theorists will start arguing about her and try to prove that she is or is not a good boat. Well, I could have sold her last year and had a boat built in France for what I would ask for her, but I

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like the dear old girl and I shall sail on her as long as she lasts. She is as good as any boat of her size. I have very good accommodations below, and enough room to carry not only food and gear but also all of my belongings; for she is my only home.

The water will be carried in galvanized iron tanks. I have had a new one built holding sixty gallons. I still dislike canned food and will only carry with me bacon, rice, potatoes, butter, milk, hard tack, jam, porridge and tea. For cooking I have a Tilley kerosene stove (which works like the Primus under pressure, but requires no prickers) hung on gimbals for cooking at sea, and a Clyde cooker to use in harbour.

To navigate, I carry a patent log, a three-inch radius micrometer sextant, the small navigation tables made by Lieutenant Johnson, R.N., which permit of very quick calculations and give an approximation less than the error of observation on a small boat, two deck watches, which stand rough treatment better than a chronometer hung in gimbals.

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A compass with card downwards (telltale) now swings above my bunk, and when resting a glance will tell me how she is heading.

I am carrying with me a bow and arrows to spear fish on the high seas, some rifles and a small motion-picture camera with a mile of film in small tin boxes, and a new metallic camera especially made for the tropics.

You will ask me where I intend to go and what are my plans. Well, it is nearly impossible for me to tell. I am a-roving—and a rover has no definite plans; it would spoil the fun of the thing. On a sail-boat one has to reckon with the wind. Why go against the wind towards certain islands if there are some equally beautiful ones to leeward? All I know is that I am going to sail to Bermuda, then through the Panama Canal towards the South Sea Islands, and cruise among them where fancy, inspiration and the spirit of adventure take me. I am in no hurry, for I am traveling with my home. I hope I shall be able to carry on always. Maybe some day I shall reach Australia, South Africa or

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South America. Who knows? I do not want to know, for I like the unexpected.

As I am writing these lines in the *Firecrest's* saloon I am surrounded by beautiful things. The teak and birds-eye maple are shining, and the new blue leather cushions are very comfortable. On the shelves some two hundred beautifully-bound books which strike an artistic note. All are sea books; some of them are over two hundred years old, and tell of the lives of the most famous sailors. Here are John Masefield, Conrad, Stevenson, London, Loti, Farrère, and all my favourite sea books, *Slocum*, *The Track of the Typhoon*, *75,000 Miles in a Ketch*, by Rollier du Baty, *The Cruise of the "Falcon,"* the *Travels of Cook* and *Marco Polo*.

I have been ashore nearly a year. I have had many difficulties to overcome, but I have won, and I am ready to sail again. Now, every minute of the day, I am thinking of departure, and of the great joy called living, when I shall be again alone on the sea.

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THE END

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